

well ? Have you thought even twice of me ? I give you three kisses · one on your heart, one on your mouth, and one on your eyes ”

The exclamation “ So you thought that I did not love you for yourself ” leaves one curious about the scene of the night before Napoleon's letter It is hardly possible that Josephine can have reproached Napoleon seriously with loving her for her money, for the supposed twenty-five thousand livres which she claimed as her income, but which were assuredly not substantial enough to meet her already vast liabilities Her perpetual financial embarrassment could scarcely be so well concealed from him that he could be accused of having imagined her desirable on account of her wealth It is conceivable that she may have charged him with wishing to marry her through ambition, since this was a motive to which he gave some colour himself At the end of the passage just referred to in Bourrienne's Memoirs, the writer says . “ I gathered from his conversation that his union with the young widow would probably aid him in attaining the objects of his ambition. His ever-growing intimacy with her whom he loved brought him in contact with the most

# THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE

VOL. I



# THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE

*NAPOLEON'S ENCHANTRESS*

By

PHILIP W. SERGEANT

Author of "The Last Empress of the French," etc

WITH 34 ILLUSTRATIONS

Vol I

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# THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE

## CHAPTER I

### JOSEPHINE'S FAMILY

WRITING in 1887, after a trip to Fort-de-France, formerly Fort-Royal, capital of the West Indian island of Martinique, the late Lafcadio Hearn remarks that the town has little of outward interest apart from the Savane, the great green public square. But that, continues Hearn in his most enthusiastic strain, would be worth the visit alone, even were it not made romantic by the marble memory of Josephine :

“ I went to look at the white dream of her there, a creation of master-sculptors. It seemed to me absolutely lovely. Sea-winds have bitten it, tropical rains have streaked it; some microscopic growth has darkened the exquisite

hollow of the throat And yet such is the human charm of the figure that you almost fancy you are gazing at a living presence Perhaps the profile is less artistically real—statuesque to the point of betraying the chisel, but when you look straight up into the sweet Creole face, you can believe she lives all the wonderful West Indian charm of the woman is there She is standing just in front of the Savane robed in the fashion of the First Empire, with gracious arms and shoulders bare one hand leans upon a medallion bearing the eagle profile of Napoleon Seven tall palms stand in a circle around her lifting their comely heads into the blue glory of the tropic day Within their enchanted circle you feel that you tread holy ground—the sacred soil of artist and poet Here the recollections of memoir writers vanish away, the gossip of history is hushed for you you no longer care to know how rumour has it that she spoke or smiled or wept only the bewitchment of her lives under the thin soft swaying shadows of those feminine palms Over the violet space of summer sea through the vast splendour of azure light she is looking back to the place of her birth back to beautiful drowsy

Trois-Ilets—and always with the same half-dreaming, half-plaintive smile—unutterably touching.”<sup>1</sup>

It would surely be impossible to find any passage in literature outside these few lines from the early pen of Lafcadio Hearn in which a better suggestion is conveyed to us of the Josephine of romance, as opposed to the Josephine of history. And the Josephine of romance may be said to bear to the actual Josephine as we find her in history the same relation that the statue so lovingly described above bore to the real woman, the wife of the First Consul and the Emperor, who never appeared without her rouge and thick coating of powder, who spent at least three hours in her dressing-room every morning, and who felt so keenly the necessity, if not of suffering, at any rate of labouring hard, to be beautiful. Yet it may be that, just as the living woman was able to exercise upon those with whom she came in contact a fascination which no statue of her could inspire, so there is more absorbing interest in the true Josephine, seen as she existed from

<sup>1</sup> Lafcadio Hearn, “Two Years in the French West Indies,”

dry to day with her frivolity and her faults so little hidden, than in the merely lovely and benevolent Empress of legend. Whatever legend could do for the first wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, it could not invent for her a more curiously picturesque career than was hers in fact. on the contrary in removing from its records so many of the actual incidents as not harmonising with the character which it was endeavouring to present it removed also a great deal of the picturesqueness.

On June 23 1763, there was born at Trois-Ilets Martinique the eldest child of Joseph-Gaspard Tascher de la Pagerie retired lieutenant of marine artillery and of his wife formerly Rose-Claire des Vergers de Sannois. To this child were given the names of Marie-Joseph-Rose, Marie from her father's mother Joseph from her father, and Rose from her mother. The name of Josephine was unknown until she met the young General Bonaparte in 1796. In her girlhood up to the time when she first sailed for France she was generally called by the pet-name of Yeyette which sounds like an infantile mispronunciation or a negro corruption

At the time of Yeyette's birth her father and mother were both under thirty years of age and had been married a year and a half. Joseph-Gaspard Tascher de la Pagerie was one of the five children of a Frenchman who had emigrated to the West Indies in 1726. The Taschers were a family of provincial nobility in the Orléanais district of France. Although claiming to trace themselves back in history to the twelfth century, they had achieved nothing to raise them from a modest station in life. The estate of La Pagerie was in the neighbourhood of Blois, and the eldest branch of the family took the name of Tascher de la Pagerie (or Lapagerie, as it was often written) after establishing itself there. Gaspard-Joseph, though the eldest son of his father, went to the West Indies with little in his pocket and without official rank, from which it has been suggested that he was a ne'er-do-well. Those whose political views made them hostile to the Empress Josephine's family pictured its founder as picking up a bare living in the service of various Martinique households. All that is certain is that his emigration to the New World did not make his fortune. His best stroke was his marriage, eight years after he

reached Martinique, to a Mlle de la Chevalerie, with whom he received as dowry some property at Carbet, near Saint Pierre and some also in the island of Saint Lucia. His debts accumulated however and he left his Carbet estate where his son Joseph Gaspard was born, and went to live at Fort-Royal. At the age of seventeen Joseph Gaspard was sent to France as a rather elderly page in the household of the Dauphine returning to Martinique three years later with the brevet rank of sub-lieutenant of marine artillery. This was the year in which warfare broke out between France and England in American waters and French needs in the West Indies brought about an appointment which had momentous consequences for the family of Tascher de la Pagerie.

In the spring of 1757 the home of the Taschers at Fort-Royal was inhabited by the father and mother with their son Joseph Gaspard and their three daughters Marie-Euphémie-Désirée Marie Paule and Marie Françoise Rose aged twenty-one nineteen and seventeen respectively. Another son Robert-Marguerite was in France. None of the children were married and the family

was in poor circumstances, although the father had succeeded in persuading the Martinique authorities to register his letters of nobility, which entitled him to certain reliefs and privileges. The advent of the specially appointed Governor and Lieutenant-General of the Antilles was doubtless looked forward to with hope ; and Gaspard-Joseph Tascher was successful in getting for his eldest daughter an appointment as companion of some sort to the Governor's wife.

Messire François de Beauharnais, *haut et puissant seigneur*, as he was styled in the Royal appointment under which he came out to the French West Indian possessions, was a wealthy man of forty-two years of age when he arrived at Martinique with his young wife and his one-year-old child, named, like himself, François. His family, like that of the Taschers, came from the Orléanais (which may account for Marie-Euphémie-Désirée obtaining her post at Government House), but it had prospered better than the Taschers, owing to the military achievements of several past Beauharnais. His conduct while Governor shows him to have been a weak and unprincipled man ; but he was possessed

of considerable influence at Court as is proved by the manner in which he managed to escape much of the punishment due to his misdeeds, and even to secure a pension for his supposed services

Before the arrival of Beauharnais Joseph Gaspard Tascher had gained the substantive rank of lieutenant for the share which he had taken in protecting Fort-Royal against English attacks. It was not however, the military abilities of Josephine's future father, but the talents of his sister that were to bring about the close connection between the Taschers and Beauharnais. Marie-Euphémie Désirée Tascher was a remarkable woman as will clearly appear from her subsequent history and as strong a character as François de Beauharnais was weak. Her entry into Government House at Fort-Royal decided the future lives of many persons. She rapidly gained a complete ascendancy over the Governor while impressing his wife so favourably that she remained on terms of friendship with her for at least four years in spite of the talk to which the intimacy of Beauharnais and the Creole girl inevitably gave rise. Perhaps it was with a desire to disarm suspicion

that the Governor endeavoured to arrange a marriage for Marie-Euphémie-Désirée with a young man on his personal staff, Alexis Renaudin, who belonged to one of the best Martinique families. Renaudin's parents, however, objected to the match, both on account of the Taschers' poor position and because the lady, they said, abused her influence with M. and Mme de Beauharnais. Consequently it was not until the father of Alexis died that the Governor was able to bring about the marriage. The widow yielded to pressure, and the wedding was celebrated on April 22, 1759.

It was owing to his fatherly exertions on behalf of his wife's companion that Beauharnais lost his post in the West Indies. The English fleet had attacked the island of Guadeloupe in January, and Beauharnais had received sufficient reinforcements to go to the aid of the French garrison early in March. Delaying six weeks in order to assist at the Renaudin marriage, he arrived at Guadeloupe in time to learn that Nadau du Treil, who was in command on the island, had surrendered a day previously. The rumour was spread about that the delay had been caused by the wedding

at Saint-Pierre of the Governor's son In reality, of course, this son was only three years old, and the wedding which lost Guadeloupe was that of Renaudin and Mlle Tascher Beauharnais, however, paid for his neglect of duty Although he was able to put the blame for the surrender of Guadeloupe upon Nadau du Treil and his fellow officers, who were court-martialled, degraded, and sent home to prison, information as to the Governor's share in the island's loss, if not as to its actual cause, reached Paris, and in spite of his influence at Court he was relieved of his command in the West Indies

Beauharnais did not return home at once His wife was expecting her second child, which furnished a reasonable pretext for delay On May 26, 1760, she gave birth to her son Alexandre-François-Marie, afterwards first husband of Josephine The infant's *ondoiement*, though not his full baptism, took place on June 10 at Saint-Pierre, his godmother being Mme Renaudin On the same day the latter sailed for France according to the local tradition accepted by Aubenas whom we may call the official biographer of Josephine M Masson,

who is less concerned than Aubenas to demonstrate the virtuous character of Mme. Renaudin, points out the lack of evidence of her presence in Paris before 1761. In the April of that year Beauharnais, with his wife and elder child, sailed from Martinique on the frigate *Hébé*. It is not a matter of very much importance whether Mme. Renaudin went with them. It is certain that since her marriage she had wielded more influence than ever over the Beauharnais, and her relations with her husband were strained to breaking-point. She never lived with Renaudin again after leaving Martinique, although there does not appear to have been any legal separation.

When the Beauharnais set sail for France, they left the infant Alexandre with his grandmother at Fort-Royal. Seven months later, on November 9, 1761, the marriage took place at Trois-Ilets of the parents of Alexandre's future wife. The Beauharnais influence was seemingly advantageous to Joseph-Gaspard Tascher as well as to his sister, for his bride belonged to the des Vergers de Sannois, one of the best island families, and brought him

some much needed relief, the dowry including an estate at Trois Ilets, where he made his home with his wife and her father and mother, and where he was living at the time of his eldest daughter's birth

French writers, whether friendly or not to the Empress Josephine, have been careful to insist on the fact that she was a Frenchwoman by birth, although narrowly escaping being born when Martinique was in the possession of England. The island had been surrendered by Beauharnais's successor, Levassor de la Touche, among those captured with the new Governor being Joseph Gaspard Tascher, who was said to have distinguished himself by holding out for nine hours against the English attack on the battery under his command. But in March 1763, news of the Treaty of Paris reached the West Indies, and early in June the French fleet commissioned to take back the lost possessions reached the islands. Martinique was therefore once again French property when Madame Joseph Gaspard Tascher gave birth to her daughter, baptised five weeks later under the names of Marie Joseph-Rose.

It may be noted here that the doubt which

was at one time thrown on the date of Josephine's birth arose chiefly from the fact that she herself made a false declaration at the time of her marriage with Napoleon Bonaparte, when she stated her birthday to be June 23, 1767. In the "*Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*" the statement that Josephine "deceived her husband by five or six years at least and produced the baptismal certificate of a younger sister, long since dead," is incorrect. Josephine's "deceit" was to the extent of four years only, and Napoleon connived at it, adding eighteen months to his own age, so as to make Josephine and himself almost the same in years. Further, the date of June 23, 1767, was not the birthday of either of the two younger Tascher sisters. They were born at Trois-Ilets in the course of the three following years—Catherine-Désirée on December 11, 1764, and Marie-Françoise on September 3, 1766.

If Josephine herself was responsible for one confusion about the date of her birth, she was in no way to blame for other doubts cast upon it. Had these doubts been justified, she would have been actually little more than a year older than she represented herself to be in

March 1796 Researchers discovered in Martinique two documents which appeared to make the Empress Josephine none other than Marie-Françoise, youngest daughter of Joseph-Gaspard Tascher and his wife. A registration was found of the death of Catherine-Désirée on October 16, 1777, and also a certificate of the burial of "Marie-Joseph-Rose" on November 5, 1791. The death of the second daughter was never in dispute. But why was the daughter who died in 1791 buried in her sister's name if she was not actually the girl born in 1763? M. Masson hazards an ingenious conjecture, which may be true though there is no evidence to support it. He mentions a document, of doubtful authenticity which recorded the birth of a female child to a Demoiselle de Tascher on March 17, 1786 (when Josephine was in France), and suggests that Marie-Françoise to shield herself may have given her married sister's names instead of her own in the baptismal certificate and that these names were retained in her burial certificate five years later.

In connection with this illegitimate child of a Demoiselle de Tascher it is rather strange that

the enemies of Josephine did not seize on the fact that Decrès, writing by Napoleon's order in 1807, spoke of "the demoiselle of eighteen years, whom Madame de la Pagerie has taken in and adopted." Had this girl, Marie-Bénaquette Tascher de la Pagerie, been really only eighteen years of age, she must have been born about 1789, that is to say, when Josephine was at Trois-Ilets during a two years' stay with her family, after her rupture with Alexandre de Beauharnais. Therefore on the ground of date alone there would have been no reason why Josephine, and not Marie-Françoise, should not have been the mother.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY YEARS IN MARTINIQUE

THE early part of Josephine's life has no place in history for the reason that it was never chronicled and this was the case because there was nothing in it which seemed worth chronicling until thirty years later. She herself kept no records of her childish days, and those writers who claimed to give any description of them drew entirely on their imagination. Aubenas alone had access to the archives of the Tascher de la Pagerie family and on his selection from the letters and documents which he was allowed to see depends what knowledge we have of the first fifteen years of our heroine's existence. And hardly before she is fourteen do we begin to get any personal details even from the biography of Aubenas.

Not long after the birth of his eldest daughter Joseph Gaspard Tascher was fortunate enough

to receive from the French Government, as a reward for his services in the defence of Martinique against the English, a pension of four hundred and fifty livres a year. Doubtless the Beauharnais influence at Court helped to secure this grant, which was small in comparison with the pension of twelve thousand livres and the title of marquis which François de Beauharnais obtained for himself in spite of his achievement at Guadeloupe. The yearly four hundred and fifty saved Tascher from complete ruin, for in August 1766 a great tempest, combined with earthquake, devastated Martinique, throwing down houses all over the island and wrecking plantations, while the sea overflowed the coasts and completed the damage. On the Taschers' estate nothing was left standing except the sugar-refinery, to which the owner with his wife and two infant children fled for shelter on August 13. In this building, altered so as to make it habitable, the family continued to live for the next twenty-five years; and it was here that Josephine spent her life between the ages of three and ten.

The small town of Trois-Ilets lies on the opposite side to Fort-Royal of the bay now

known as that of Fort de-France, and takes its name from three little islands rising out of the sea in front of it. Aubenas visited the place in the middle of last century, when it was not very much changed since the days of Josephine's childhood. The town of Trois-Ilets then contained about fifty wooden houses and a modest church, in which was the family vault of the Taschers. The Three Islets had only a few fishermen's huts upon them about which spread the nets drying in the sun. To reach the estate it was necessary to keep the town on one's left hand and it took about a quarter of an hour's walk to reach a high point on the road whence the old buildings could be seen. The detailed description of Aubenas is worth quotation.

"Situated on a small eminence surrounded by larger hills, once covered by rich plantations and now for the most part given up to parasitic weeds, the Sannois-La Pagerie homestead looks the very abode of peace and forgetfulness. A few steps only from the sea, although it is out of sight and even out of hearing, separated from the town of Trois-Ilets by the Morne Gantheaume, which cuts off the view one can

only see around one an amphitheatre of verdure, roofed by a sky whose exquisite transparency is the wonder and despair of the painter. From the extent of the buildings—the erections still standing and the ruins which the eye can make out under the grass—it is possible to judge the former importance of the estate, one of the largest in this once flourishing quarter of the island. On arrival we come first on the dwelling-house, originally constructed on a large scale, as is proved by what remains of its out-buildings, but it has become since the storm of 1766, and in anticipation of future disasters of the same kind, a simple wooden house. In front of this was a large court planted with tamarinds and sand-box trees, of which a few survive.

“Next comes the sugar-mill with its circle of heavy pillars and its huge roof of red tiles of native manufacture. About it were the sheds containing the cane-refuse destined to heat the refinery furnaces; the flour-hut where the negroes came to prepare their manioc; the hospital for the care of the slaves; and the prison, rarely tenanted on the La Pagerie estate.

"Coming down a few paces from the mill, we reach the refinery, a huge building forty metres long by twenty broad, and divided into several sections for the production of cane sugar. Alongside the refinery runs a second garden built up on a terrace. On looking at the monumental solidity of the refinery it is possible to understand how it withstood the terrible storm. During the years which followed, the building was adapted to shelter the La Pagerie family. A low gallery was added on the southern side and rooms were fitted up in the upper part until a new dwelling-house should be erected. A little stream, a mere brook without a name, though its waters were always pure, flowed below the refinery after running through a rock-hewn basin where, according to the Creole custom, M de Tascher's daughters took their daily bath in the shade of the great mango-trees which protected them from the heat of the sun and from indiscreet eyes. Between this tank and the refinery were the negroes' huts, built in stages on the slope of the hill and surrounded by banana, orange, and bread fruit trees."

In this home, although her father's circum

stances did not allow him to keep it up in any great style, and although the hundred and fifty negro slaves which his daughter's more enthusiastic biographers gave to him probably existed only in their imaginations,<sup>1</sup> Josephine doubtless spent an early childhood of great ease and freedom. The chief charge of her was in the hands of a mulatto woman. This was the demoiselle Marion, *mulâtresse libre de Martinique*, who in an Imperial decree of 1807 received an annual pension of twelve hundred francs from the Emperor in recognition of the care which she had bestowed upon "our well-loved spouse, the Empress of the French, Queen of Italy, during her tenderest infancy." Under the control of Marion it is easy to imagine that Yeyette found life not only easy but idle. Aubenas, as the historian chosen by the family, pictures her learning her early lessons at her mother's side. But she knew little enough when she left school, and her knowledge must have been indeed scanty when she went thither at the age of ten. It may be granted, however, that on one point she had an excellent education.

<sup>1</sup> M. Masson, "Joséphine de Beauharnais," p. 35, suggests fifteen or twenty negroes as the more probable figure.

at Trois-Ilets—in the love of nature which was so marked a characteristic throughout her life. Amid the lovely surroundings of her home, in its setting of evergreen wooded hills and West Indian sky and sea, she did not fail to find an influence which continued to her death, even though it might appear to find outward expression principally in the extravagances of the Malmaison garden.

It was in 1773 that Josephine was sent to school at the convent of the Dames de la Providence, Fort-Royal. Her grandmother Tascher was still living at Fort-Royal, in company with her daughter Marie-Françoise-Rose, Josephine's "Aunt Rosette." Six years previously Madame Tascher had become a widow. At the end of 1769 she had surrendered charge of the little Alexandre de Beauharnais, who was sent at last to his father in France. When, therefore, Josephine came to Fort-Royal her grandmother and aunt were living alone, and it seems probable that she spent the greater part of her next four years with them out of school hours.

The institution of the Dames de la Providence was not the best school in Martinique, and

Josephine did not acquire much wisdom there. This was perhaps not altogether the fault of her teachers, for she never showed any of the aptitude for learning which afterwards made her children Hortense and Eugène the pride of the schools to which they were put at Saint-Germain. It was to the accomplishments of music and dancing that Josephine devoted herself with the greatest pleasure at the convent "A surprising taste for music . . . a very pretty voice," were the points on which her father felt justified in dwelling when writing about his eldest daughter to the Marquis de Beauharnais in January 1778

Josephine was fourteen years of age <sup>1</sup> when she returned from Fort-Royal and the convent of the Dames de la Providence to her father's home. Into the two following years of her life the more romantic—and unscrupulous—writers who have interested themselves in her career have endeavoured to introduce a love-story or two, feeling no doubt the want of something to

<sup>1</sup> It is usually said in the biographies of Josephine that she remained at school until she was fifteen. But her father's letter of January 9, 1778, to Madame Renaudin, speaks of his eldest daughter "who has left the convent some time." Her fifteenth birthday was not until the following June 23.

give an interest to the very few and bare outlines of the Empress's early life. The efforts of these romancers hardly deserve notice. There is only one piece of first-hand evidence which is to be found in the memoirs of General Tercier. Now Tercier, although he claims that "Truth was always his idol" scarcely inspires much confidence when he describes his relations with Josephine. Nor does he say very much. He is speaking of the year 1778, when he was twenty-six.

"Young, lively and ardent I was present at every fete and gathering of pleasant society. Among those whom I met was Mademoiselle Tascher de la Pagerie the celebrated Empress Josephine. I was on intimate terms with all her family. I often spent several days in her mother's house. She was young then so was I." <sup>1</sup>

Subsequent writers appear to have paid particular attention to the dots with which the passage closes.

A few pages later Tercier records

'About this time [September 1779] the vessel *Le Fier*, 50 guns. Commander Turpin left for France carrying on board her who was

one day to be the Empress of the French. She was eighteen years of age, although the 'Almanach Impérial' always made her out nine or ten years less than she actually was. I accompanied her from Fort-Royal with her family on board the ship I was, as I have said, very intimate with the family, which escorted her in full force and put her into the captain's hands, with one mulatto woman to wait on her during the voyage."

Now Josephine was not eighteen, but sixteen, when she left Martinique (though she was admittedly well grown for her age), and she did not sail on the *Fier*, but on the *Ile de France*. Moreover, her father and her aunt Rosette accompanied her to France. Tercier's intimacy with the Taschers, therefore, does not seem to have made him a very observant witness of their doings. It is surely unsafe to build too much on the evidence of this idolater of Truth, even when he has recourse to modest dots. The editor of the General's memoirs, M. C. de la Chanoine, states that when Tercier was imprisoned in the Temple as a Royalist conspirator in 1798-9, Josephine used her influence to have him released and so, "by a delicate intervention,

not recorded in the memoirs, repaid the debt owed by the heart of Mlle de la Pagerie " One would not expect Tercier to omit such an incident as Josephine's intervention had it ever occurred, and M de la Chanoine's assumption appears gratuitous

A wider celebrity has been gained by the story of the early loves of Josephine and "*l'Anglais*" although the latter, unlike General Tercier wrote nothing to perpetuate the legend The tradition, however, persisted that there was a young Englishman in Martinique during Josephine's girlhood between whom and her there was a strong attachment and that in the year 1814, when the Allies were in possession of Paris this Englishman who had now risen to the rank of General wrote to the ex-Empress reminding her of their early acquaintance Josephine invited him to dinner at Malmaison but on the appointed day she was in her last illness and she died without ever having seen him again In the pretended memoirs of Josephine by Mme Lenormand the name of the Englishman or rather Scotsman is given as Williams de K—— presumably in order to give more semblance of reality to the tale!

There is one story of Josephine's Martinique days which stands on a different footing from the boastings of General Tercier or the fairy-tales of Mme. Lenormand. This story appears in many versions, and no doubt she herself told it many times and added to its details as she grew older. But that there was a foundation of truth for it appears from a passage in the memoirs of General Lamarque, whose good faith there seems no reason to doubt. It will suffice to quote Lamarque's words .

“In my childhood I met Josephine at the house of an American lady, Mme. de Hostein, with whom she had been brought up. She was then the wife of Alexandre de Beauharnais, who made himself prominent in the Constituent Assembly by his grace, wit, and patriotic principles. I saw her again several years later when I was commissioned to carry to Paris the flags taken from the Spaniards at the battle of Saint-Martial and at the capture of Fontarabia. She had come out of prison the night before, together with the good Mme. Hostein, and we were dining with the well-known General Santerre, who during his captivity with these ladies had given great care and attention to them. It was now

(*thermidor* 1794) that I heard told for the first time the prediction made to her by a gipsy woman that 'she would one day be Queen of France, but that she would not die a queen' 'Robespierre nearly upset the prophecy,' she said with a laugh Josephine married Bonaparte He was commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy, and the world resounded with his name Mme Hostein said to me on her death-bed, in a feeble voice 'Well, dear friend, the gipsy made a mistake about the country It is not Queen of France but Queen of Italy that Josephine will be!'"<sup>1</sup>

It does not seem right, therefore, to reject the story of the gipsy's prediction entirely, common as such tales are in the histories of those who rise from insignificance to a throne But the elaborate accounts of the meeting between the Creole girl and the prophetess, with the embellishments of the ladies who took the narrative from the Empress and put it in their reminiscences, need not be accepted too seriously We may leave them and turn to the period when actual documentary evidence begins to be available

<sup>1</sup> Lamarque Mémoires I. p 405

On October 23, 1777, when Josephine was a little over fourteen years of age, the Marquis de Beauharnais in Paris dictated to his seventeen-year-old son Alexandre a letter in which he protested his constant attachment and friendship to M Joseph-Gaspard Tascher de la Pagerie and proceeded to unfold before him a scheme which he was satisfied would prove his sincerity. It was in these words that he set forth his idea

“My children now enjoy an income of forty thousand livres apiece It lies in your power to give me your daughter to share the fortune of my *chevalier*. The respect and affection which he feels for Madame Renaudin inspire him with an ardent desire to be united to one of her nieces I am only acquiescing in the demand which he makes of me, I assure you, when I demand your second daughter, whose age is more suited to his. I could much have wished that your eldest daughter had been a few years younger, when she would certainly have had the preference, since I have had quite as favourable a picture of her. But I confess to you that my son, who is only seventeen and a half, finds a young lady of fifteen too close in years to himself This

is one of those occasions on which a sensible parent is bound to yield to the force of circumstances "

After alluding to Alexandre's qualifications as a suitor, the Marquis assured his friend that no dowry would be expected with his daughter, whom he besought him to bring or send to France as soon as possible. He wrote also to Mme Tascher, apologising to her likewise for choice of the second before the eldest daughter

" It is not [he said] that I have not been told most agreeable things about the eldest, but my son finds her too old in comparison with himself. My son is quite worthy of being your son-in-law. Nature has endowed him with fine and noble qualities, and his fortune is large enough for him to share with the woman who can make him happy. This is what I hope to find in your daughter, of whom a charming portrait has been drawn for me. Let her but resemble you, madame, and I shall have no doubt about my son's happiness ! "

If the courtly phrasing of the above letters was the Marquis's and the penmanship Alexandre's, it is not difficult to see that the inspira-

tion was that of a third person. Mme. Renaudin now ruled the life of the Marquis de Beauharnais more firmly than ever. Estranged from her husband even in Martinique, after her arrival in France she was not long in returning to the shelter of the Beauharnais home. But her friendship with the Marquise, hitherto so unsuspecting, at last came to an end, and the household was broken up. As might have been expected, it was not Mme. Renaudin who departed, but Mme. de Beauharnais. She went to live with her mother until her death in 1767, which left the former companion in undisputed command of the situation and practical controller of the lives of the Marquis and his younger son.

The fact of Mme. Renaudin's ascendancy over them explains what would otherwise be difficult to understand, namely the keen anxiety of both father and son to obtain the hand of a young girl whom they had never seen; a young girl, too, who had neither money nor exceptionally good descent to recommend her. Catherine-Désirée Tascher was not one of the Creole heiresses among whom the nobility of France were wont to look for the means of regilding their scutcheon, knowing that with the money they

might count also upon winning wives with a grace and charm which could not be matched at home among the daughters of rich manufacturers. Was not the Marquis careful to impress upon M. Tascher that he expected no dowry? It was therefore for some other reason that the alliance was sought, and Mme Renaudin alone can supply that reason. This clever woman had dominated Beauharnais for twenty years, to the great advantage of herself and her family, and she had no intention of relaxing her hold. The union of Alexandre with one of her nieces would secure part of the Beauharnais revenues for a Tascher, and to gain her end she used every means of which she could think. She impressed upon both father and son the good points of her nieces, probably persuading Alexandre to the match during a holiday spent with her at Noisy-le Grand, where, with the fortune which she had accumulated since her connection with the Marquis, she had taken a country house for herself at a cost of thirty-three thousand livres.

Mme Renaudin probably did not expect any opposition on the part of her brother, but she thought it advisable to point out to him the

desirability of Alexandre. "All that I could tell you about him would be below his deserts," she wrote. "A pleasing face, a charming figure, intelligence, talent, knowledge, and (what is beyond price) all the noble qualities of soul and heart are united in him." Such a character should indeed have grown up into the lofty and patriotic Vicomte de Beauharnais of the Josephine legend. There does not seem much relation between a paragon of the kind described and the actual Vicomte. But then Alexandre was a devoted godson, and his god-mother could not but be blind to his faults—especially when making a match for him.

Like her protector, Mme. Renaudin felt that a slight might seem to be inflicted on Josephine by the choice of her sister rather than herself as the bride of Alexandre de Beauharnais, and she wrote to her brother. "It is vexing that your eldest daughter is not at least three years younger than the *chevalier*. But this is not the first time that the younger has been settled before the elder, and we must suppose it to be the will of Heaven, since the age of the second suits better."

It certainly seems strange to the reader of

rise to these sentiments, and it may inspire them in one case as in the other I must tell you that Manette will be well off as regards looks. She unites ingenuous gaiety to a sensible character education will do the rest I have spoken to Manette of the journey to France. After many difficulties and regrets about leaving her mother she has at last consented knowing that she will find a second mother in her dear aunt.

"The eldest who has left the convent some time and who has on several occasions asked me to take her to France will be a little affected. I fancy, by the preference which I appear to have given to her younger sister. She has a very good skin good eyes good arms and a surprising taste for music. I gave her a teacher for the guitar while she was at the convent and she made full use of this and has a very pretty voice. It is a pity that she has not the advantage of an education in France. If only I were concerned I would have brought you two girls instead of one. But how can one part a mother from two daughters at a moment when death has robbed her of a third?"

M. Tascher was not destined to be disappointed. As he hoped, it was a child not one

particular child, that was asked of him. "Come with one of your daughters or with two," replied Mme. Renaudin when she received his letter "Whatever you do will be pleasing to us. We must have a child from you."

But, in spite of the double chance given to the father to get rid of a daughter, he was now confronted by a difficulty which he had not foreseen. He had hoped to leave Trois-Ilets in the spring of 1778, taking Manette with him. At the last moment Manette withdrew her "consent," supported, or rather instigated, by her mother and grandmother, and was prostrated by a three months' attack of fever, which was attributed naturally by the two ladies to the violence which had been done to her feelings by the attempt to tear her away from her home. M. Tascher wrote apologetically in June, the day after Josephine's fifteenth birthday, reminding his sister of the blind attachment which Creole mothers were known to feel for their children. With some hesitation he proceeded to play his third card. Failing the dead child and Manette, there still remained Yeyette.

"If I had proper means at the moment I

would leave and bring the elder, who is burning with desire to see her dear aunt. They have tried to put her on her guard too but as she is more reasonable and has spent part of her childhood with our mother and Rosette, she is beyond reach of what has been said to her, and I am sure of her great desire to know her dear aunt and to deserve her kindness and that of M<sup>de</sup> de Beauharnais. Two reasons have restrained me however, I must confess lack of present means and her fifteen years. This age seems to me too close to that of the *cavalier*. She is moreover, very advanced for her years, and during the past five or six months has grown to look at least eighteen. Apart from this, she is well enough of a very sweet disposition, playing the guitar a little with a pretty voice and a talent for music, in which she will soon perfect herself as well as for dancing. But I fancy this will not meet your views which are of course to train up for yourself a young person and to make her worthy of the object who merits our affection as much for his personal merit as for the gratitude which we owe to his dear papa " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated Fort Royal June 24 1778

If M Tascher's letter was carelessly composed and hardly worthy of being read by her whom her godson proclaimed to be a rival of Mme de Sévigné,<sup>1</sup> the writer might at least have pleaded in excuse his agitation arising from Manette's defiance of his authority and from his own "lack of present means," which prevented him from taking Yeyette to France in place of her younger sister. Nor did the efforts to aid him of his sister and the Marquis enable him to leave Martinique yet. Crossing the letter to Mme Renaudin came one from Beauharnais, sending him an authorisation to publish the banns of marriage in Martinique, the place for the name of the bride being left blank. All that the Marquis insisted upon was that one or other of the girls should come to France as soon as possible. He himself might die, he explained, and his son's guardians might then compel Alexandre to marry some one else—an argument in which the anxiety of Mme Renaudin may easily be detected. Six weeks later the Marquis wrote again, stating that Alexandre would prefer the elder girl as his wife, so that the difficulty caused by Manette's attachment to her mother

<sup>1</sup> See p. 48

was removed "The day of your arrival with your daughter," concluded the letter<sup>1</sup> "will be a truly happy day for us"

This is the first mention which there is in the correspondence of Alexandre's desire to marry Josephine But as a matter of fact, he had expressed his preference for the elder of the two surviving daughters as soon as he heard of Catherine-Désirée's death When Tascher's letter announcing Manette's refusal to leave her mother was forwarded by the Marquis to Alexandre then with his regiment near Brest he replied in a note which deserves quotation for its quaint wording

"My dear papa," he wrote "your packet has just reached me I have read all the letters in it and I take up my pen at once to answer you I can imagine the difficulties made by these ladies about sending their daughter to France They say 'If the marriage does not take place there is a journey in vain and we shall much regret then having separated her from us' However one cannot answer for two people who do not know one another pleasing one another and surely your intention is not to make me

<sup>1</sup> September 9 1778

marry this young lady if she and I should feel a mutual repugnance. I do not doubt, after the description which has been given of her, that she will please me. I hope to be so happy as to inspire in her the feelings which I shall experience. There is every reason to conclude that the marriage will be accomplished as we first arranged it, if M. de la Pagerie will bring us the elder of his two daughters. The affection and desire which this young person shows to make her aunt's acquaintance decides me in her favour, and I am already most flattered at having already in common with her the tender feeling which she has for her."

The "young person's" fate was at length decided. As far as the consent of the two fathers and the bridegroom was concerned, all was now clear for Josephine's marriage to Alexandre de Beauharnais. M. Tascher had the banns published in April 1779. Whatever opposition his wife and mother may have made was unavailing. But there was, nevertheless, a very serious obstacle in the way. War between France and England had broken out again, and to cross the Atlantic involved considerable risk of capture. Hence, in spite of the urgent

appeals of Mme Renaudin who feared that the Beauharnais family might interfere or that Alexandre might grow cold through delay, it was not until the autumn of 1779 that Josephine set sail with her father and her aunt Rosette

The vessel which conveyed the voyagers was the *Ile de France*, which formed part of a convoy under the protection of the warship *Pomone*. The passage of the Atlantic was very rough and troublesome but the English at least were avoided and on October 20 M Tascher was able to write to his expectant sister that he had reached Brest very ill but bringing his elder daughter with him

Josephine was thus a little over sixteen years of age when she landed in France, and the negotiations had lasted almost two years which ended in bringing her from Martinique as a substitute for her two sisters. Some further delay was still necessary partly on account of her father's weakness after the voyage and partly in order to allow for the publication of the banns in Paris and the drawing up of the marriage settlements. In the meantime the meeting took place between the future husband and wife—their first meeting unless they had

seen each other before Alexandre left Fort-Royal for France at the end of 1769, when he was nine and Josephine six ; and of this the correspondence gives no hint. On receipt of Tascher's letter announcing his arrival, Alexandre had started off with Mme Renaudin for Brest, where the encounter took place.

It is unfortunate that no record survives, as far as we know, of Josephine's first impressions of France or of her bridegroom ; it is generally the case throughout her history that we have the letters to or about her, but not her own letters. Alexandre's impressions of her are preserved in a communication to his father, dated Oct 28. It is not the letter of an enthusiastic lover, nor does it convey much idea of her personality at this period " Mlle de la Pagerie," he wrote, " will perhaps appear to you less pretty than you expected, but I think I can assure you that the uprightness and sweetness of her character surpass all that you can have been told about it " Six days later he added a postscript to a letter from Mme. Renaudin to the Marquis : " The pleasure of being with Mlle. de la Pagerie, with her to whom the name of ' your daughter ' sounds so sweet, is the only reason for my

silence It would be hard for me to express to you how great is her impatience to be presented to you , and we flatter ourselves that you feel some desire to embrace two children whose happiness will consist in working for your happiness " This is rather more affectionate than the previous letter, but is still very correct Correctness of language and of attitude was the constant ideal of Alexandre de Beauharnais He wished it also to be his wife's for he left it on record some years later that on the very first day of his meeting with Josephine he "formed the plan of beginning her education afresh and of making up by his zeal for the neglect of the first fifteen years of her life " A pleasant prospect for the idle young Creole girl whose mental development was so far behind her bodily growth !

The wedding of Alexandre de Beauharnais and Marie-Joseph-Rose Tascher de la Pagerie was celebrated on December 13 1779 at the parish church of Noisy-le-Grand very appropriately seeing that it was here that was the home of the organiser of the union, the god-mother of the bridegroom and aunt of the bride The efforts of Mme Renaudin to bind

together the Taschers and the Beauharnais had at last been rewarded with a success patent to all the world. The marriage was a guarantee that part at least of Alexandre's wealth should pass securely into the hands of her niece. On the possessions of Alexandre's father she had already a firm hold; and it only remained for her to give regularity to her position in the Marquis's house by marrying him herself. Then the work which she had begun as the young Creole companion in the Governor's house at Fort-Royal would be complete. But, although she became a widow in 1785, she did not marry the Marquis until 1796, when the lapse of time might surely have seemed to render such a step unnecessary

## CHAPTER III

### THE VICOMTESSE DE BEAUHARNAIS

AFTER the wedding at Noisy le Grand, Alexandre de Beauharnais and his wife went to live in the Paris home of Alexandre's father situated in the gloomy rue Thévenot—a street which must have been especially depressing to the sixteen-year-old Creole girl fresh from the sunshine and warmth of Martinique. Of course to the family biographer the situation appears in bright hues. The household declares Aubenas,<sup>1</sup> was happy from the start.

“With a husband of talent and spirit brilliant and feted, a father-in-law full of affection from the first moment and soon an adorer of the sweetness of her character a brother and sister-in-law who asked nothing better than to become her friends an aunt whom she loved all the better now that she knew her and a father gradually recovering the

<sup>1</sup> “Histoire de l'Impératrice Joséphine pp 102-3

health of which he had despaired, the young Vicomtesse de Beauharnais might promise herself a charming existence. . . . The first year passed away amid the enchantment of a world both new and curious to her, in the admiration of the marvels of Paris, the hope or the regret of every Creole woman's imagination."

This is the ideal view of affairs ; in reality, the prospect was by no means so brilliant for Josephine Financially the match was not bad, since, if the income of forty thousand livres which the Marquis had attributed to his son in his first letter to M. Tascher was uncertain, being partly derived from property in distant and unsettled San Domingo, at least it was considerably better than the income upon which the Taschers had lived at Trois-Ilets Then the Marquis de Beauharnais was certainly an affectionate father-in-law, apart from his willingness to look on the world through the eyes of Mme Renaudin, who never failed in her devotion to her own family But, after all, it depended upon her husband whether Josephine was to be happy in her married life , and Alexandre, young as he was, was not slow to show himself a particularly displeasing

combination of Don Juan and a pedant Gallantry came to him by nature pedantry by his education under his tutor Patricol, an excellently disposed man entirely led astray by the theories of Rousseau and Raynal Engaged by the Marquis de Beauharnais to teach his sons Patricol had left when the elder of these entered the army and gone into the employ of the Duc de la Rochefoucauld as tutor of his two nephews the young Rohan-Chabots Alexandre was fourteen years of age when this happened and on the invitation of the democratic Duke he had followed Patricol to Roche Guyon to be steeped still further in the atmosphere of Rousseau Under Patricol's direction he continued the worship of Mme Renaudin in which he had been trained in his father's house At this early age we find him writing to his godmother beseeching her to persevere in her letters to him thereby at once conferring upon him a great pleasure and forming his style "Mme de Sévigné" he assured her ' will no longer be necessary to me "

At fifteen Alexandre entered the army assuming about the same time the title of Vi

comte, to which his right was very shadowy. Military life did not undo the effects of his past lessons, and, to tell the truth, he did not exert himself after active service. In June 1779, indeed, he contemplated the happiness of dating letters to his godmother "from Portsmouth or Plymouth"; but he continued to write them, instead, in France. As in most departments of life, Alexandre de Beauharnais was in his soldiering theoretical rather than practical.

To such a husband the mentally unformed Josephine only appealed at first as a subject for education, and after a short time appealed not at all. Even Aubenas, with his anxiety to see all in the best possible light, cannot produce too plausible an apology for the Vicomte. He writes ·<sup>1</sup>

"Alexandre loved his wife less than she loved him. The circumstances of their marriage contributed to this state of affairs. The choice of a bride, made at a distance, almost at haphazard, and only fixing on Josephine after temporarily settling on her two sisters; the marriage of the young girl, hardly a month

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire," p. 109.

after the first meeting chiefly out of affection for a godmother and deference to a father her unformed beauty, her rather heavy figure, not yet suggesting its future consummate elegance, her imperfect education—all this made the position a peculiar one, and one whose fruits were sure to be bitter. When actual possession had cooled the youthful heat which Alexandre had mistaken for passion lukewarmness was certain to follow soon."

Lukewarmness appears to have followed very soon indeed. In the spring of 1780 the Vicomte left his wife to rejoin his regiment. In August we find him writing to her assuring her of the pleasure he would have in seeing her again in a month's time and swearing to her afresh that he was and had been faithful to her which seems somewhat strange. Had Josephine any ground for suspecting infidelity or had she for no reason exhibited extreme jealousy? It is difficult to discover any details about her early married life. There is certainly no evidence to justify the pictures of a brilliant launch into society which it has pleased some biographers to paint. If we trusted Imbert de Saint Amand author of numerous work

about Josephine from her first days to her death at Malmaison, we should believe that the Vicomte de Beauharnais "introduced his wife to the best salons of Paris, where she met with a gracious welcome, since she had already acquired the gift of pleasing which distinguished her throughout life" But there is nothing to show that the Vicomte did anything of the kind He could certainly have taken his wife to Court, had he wished, but Aubenas is obliged to admit that her name was not to be found on the list of those presented. What seems probable is that he considered her unfitted for the society in which he mixed until she should have educated herself under his direction; and he grew tired of directing before Josephine had time to learn She persevered with her "accomplishments," taking up the harp in place of the guitar on coming to France, and devoting attention to dancing, in which her husband was proficient. In other respects, the burden which Alexandre wished to lay upon her was too heavy, and it is easy to imagine that the months which she spent at the house in the rue Thévenot, with her father-in-law, aunt, and ailing father, or at

Noisy-le Grand in the summer, under the eye of Mme Renaudin were far from being as enchanting as has been assumed by some

The brilliant society in which she was supposed to mix probably did not include any more distinguished people than Alexandre's own relatives, the Vicomte François and his wife and the Countess Fanny François de Beauharnais the younger was in the opposite political camp to his brother and was not on intimate terms with him The Countess who had married in extreme youth but was living apart from the uncle of François and Alexandre was one of the Mouchard family which\* became prominent later under the Second Empire owing to the patronage of the Empress Eugénie She was a woman of literary aspirations rather than talents, and her novels plays and philosophic poems were much admired by those whom it paid to admire them though the uncharitable said that her lovers were responsible for her prose and verse Her visits to the rue Thévenot doubtless introduced an occasional atmosphere of polite culture of a kind which can hardly have appealed to the unlearned Josephine

It is only from a few letters again, and none

of them from her own pen, that we are able to get an insight into Josephine's life at this period. A characteristic communication from Alexandre to Mme Renaudin in November 1780 acknowledges two letters from Josephine which she had forwarded to him. He "readily recognised the charm of her style in the first of these letters," he remarked—from which it appears that Mme Renaudin supervised her niece's writings to her husband. Alexandre continues .

"You ask my advice as to the course to be taken about my wife's letters. I will repeat what I have already said. Were I sure that she alone had handled the pen I should feel more pleasure in hearing the flattering things which she tells me, and should persuade myself more easily that they came from her heart. As for the phrasing, I do not care much about its precision. Besides, to judge by her last letter, she has made considerable progress and need no longer blush to write to any one, least of all to her husband. Try therefore to get her to take counsel of nobody as to what she shall write."

Still more interesting and illuminating is a

letter from Alexandre to Josephine herself in the following May <sup>1</sup>

" I found your two letters charming, *ma chère amie*, particularly the first, since you do not therein make any complaints against me, while in the second you charge me with not showing enough anxiety to tell you about my journey. This undeserved reproach (seeing that I wrote to you the day after my arrival) would affect me if I were not persuaded that it was inspired by friendship. I am delighted at the desire which you manifest that I should instruct you. Such a taste, which is always capable of being gratified, is the source of an ever pure enjoyment and has the precious advantage of leaving no regret behind. If you persist in the resolution which you have formed, the acquirements which will be yours will raise you above others and, adding knowledge to modesty, will make you an accomplished woman,' etc etc

There is something pathetic in the idea here presented of Josephine, not yet eighteen years of age, craving news of a husband whom she

<sup>1</sup> According to Aubenas. We should be tempted to refer it to the May of the previous year after reading Patricola's report opposite

must somehow have loved and getting instead such compositions as the above That she still loved her husband appears from the hints of jealousy and also from her desire, which so pleased the pedant in Alexandre, to be instructed by him ; since desire for instruction such as Alexandre wished to impart never manifested itself at any other period of Josephine's life.

As a matter of fact, the Vicomte de Beauharnais was more estranged from his wife than could be gathered from the two letters quoted. The proof of this is to be found in a long account given by Patricol to Mme Renaudin of a conversation which he had with his former pupil during a visit by Alexandre to Roche-Guyon. Mme Renaudin had enlisted Patricol's help to repair the breach which she saw widening between her niece and her godson, and the ancient tutor on June 5, 1781, thus reported Alexandre's attitude toward his wife :

“ When I first saw Mlle de Lapagerie [Alexandre is represented as saying], I thought that I could live happily with her At that moment I formed the plan of beginning her education again and repairing by my zeal the neglect of the first fifteen years of her life Soon after our

marriage I discovered in her a lack of confidence which astonished me, since I had done everything to inspire her with that confidence, and I confess to you that this discovery rather cooled my zeal for instructing her. It did not, however, extinguish it. I even tried to excuse her, and I continued with my plan until at last I perceived in her an indifference and an absence of desire to instruct herself which convinced me that I was wasting my time. I then renounced my plan and left the education of my wife to whosoever wished. Instead of remaining at home a greater part of my time with an object who has nothing to say to me, I am going out much more often than I intended, and I am resuming in part the life of my old bachelor days. I beg you to believe that it is not that it does not cost my heart dear to renounce the happiness promised me by my idea of a well ordered household. Although I have gone into the world much since I enjoyed my freedom, I still have not lost the taste for work. I am quite ready to put the happiness of a home and domestic peace before the disturbing pleasures of society. But it seemed to me, acting thus, that if my wife truly felt friendship for

me, she would make efforts to attract me to her and to acquire the qualities which I love and which can keep a hold over me. Well, what has come to pass is the contrary of what I expected; and, instead of my seeing my wife striving after instruction and accomplishments, she has become jealous and has developed all the qualities of that baneful passion. This is how we stand to-day. It is her desire that in society I should pay attention to her alone. She wants to know what I say, do, write, etc., and never thinks of learning the true methods of attaining this end and of winning the confidence which I only keep back with regret and feel that I shall give her on the first sign which she gives of her anxiety to become better educated and more lovable."

If we assume Patricol's report of Alexandre's words to be true (and they certainly sound like what he might have been expected to say), the May letter to Josephine cannot have been sincere in its expression of that *amitié* which with him took the place of conjugal love, for the speech to Patricol manifests no sudden decision to try the effect of neglect upon Josephine.

In sending his report to Mme. Renaudin

Patricol expressed his regret that he could not himself act as Josephine's tutor, and he recommended that she should devote her attention to the study of literature, history, and geography. But Josephine not only was obliged to do without the instruction of her husband's old teacher, she found little time to carry out his advice as to study, even if she wished to do so. She returned from her summer season at Noisy expecting a child, and on September 3 she gave birth to a son, who received the names of Eugène-Rose and who afterwards became celebrated as Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy. Alexandre came to Paris to be present at the christening, and the family was in hopes that the advent of a son would reconcile him to his young wife. These hopes were disappointed. Alexandre showed no signs of greater kindness, and Mme Renaudin, who was not blind to the evil effects of his relapse into the life of his old bachelor days, as the Vicomte himself expressed it, advised him to pay a visit to Italy. It was not hard for her to persuade her godson of the educational advantages of such a journey. He was charmed with the idea of enlarging his mind—and of escaping from

the jealousy and lack of intellect shown by his wife Accordingly Josephine was left once more in the rue Thévenot, with only the additional distraction of her new-born infant to vary the monotony of her days On the birth of a grandson her father at length made up his mind to return to Martinique. In his two years' sojourn in France he had failed to obtain a much-wished-for increase in his pension from the Government. But, on the other hand, he did obtain the Cross of Saint-Louis ; and from his sister Mme. Renaudin, always ready to share her gains with her family, a loan of twenty-six thousand livres.

When the Vicomte de Beauharnais returned from his doubtless improving trip to Italy at the end of July 1782, he found that his wife and child had removed with his father and Mme Renaudin to a new home in the rue Saint-Charles, a rather less gloomy house than that in the rue Thévenot At first the advice of Mme. Renaudin seemed to have worked well, for he was described as enchanted to be with his wife again, and he resumed cohabitation with her. But it was soon apparent that his attitude toward her was unchanged. He seized upon a

pretext to rejoin his regiment at Verdun Aubenas can find nothing better to say than that "his absence, although justified by his military duties, none the less awakened in his wife (prevented from following him by the regulations and by the care of her infant) new attacks of jealousy, which she could not prevent and which Alexandre did not try to assuage by frequent visits" So far from attempting to pay frequent visits to Paris, the Vicomte at the end of September, only two months after his return from Italy, volunteered to join an expedition starting across the Atlantic to relieve Martinique from one of the periodical English attacks Before he left Brest he was informed by a message from Josephine that she was again with child by him, whereupon he was kind enough to write a letter expressing his happiness at the news—a letter of some considerable importance, as it afterwards proved

Once more, therefore, Josephine was deserted by the husband of whom she had seen so little—ten months in all, it has been computed—during their three years of married life, and if her affection had succeeded in surviving the cruel tests to which it had been put in that time she can

have seen him depart with no light heart. The jealousy which he made one of his complaints against her was not unjustified. Even his friendly critics were obliged to admit his excessive gallantry toward the other sex (*une grande coquetterie avec les femmes* is the expression used by Aubenas); and if this was so in France, where his family's sympathy with his wife restrained him, what was to be looked for when he was safely across the Atlantic?

It was not long before the fears which Josephine must have felt were realised. On his arrival in Martinique, Alexandre paid a visit to Trois-Ilets, where he found his welcome from the Tascher family less warm than he may have expected. His mother-in-law, in particular, took the opportunity to speak to him in a way which he did not appreciate. Naturally she had received from her husband, when he returned from France, a description of the manner in which her daughter had been neglected during the first two years of marriage.

The ostensible reasons for which Alexandre de Beauharnais had gone to the West Indies were dissatisfaction with his rank as captain only and desire for active military service. Un-

fortunately for him, the political situation changed soon after his arrival, and instead of war there was peace, under the preliminaries of the Treaty of Versailles. His time therefore hung heavily on his hands, and having nothing better to do he commenced an intrigue. The object was a Martinique lady, some years his senior, who had an unknown reason for hating Josephine, and was well enough acquainted with her early history to be able to poison her husband's mind against her. That she should have been able to do so proves nothing against Josephine. Beauharnais had never loved his wife, had already been unfaithful, was bored with her and had quarrelled with her family, and Josephine's enemy no doubt expressed a passion for him which blinded him to the malice of her insinuations. He gladly believed whatever monstrous stories were told to him.

The result of the base attack on the unfortunate Josephine's character was soon apparent. On April 10 1783 she gave birth to a daughter Hortense Eugénie afterwards Queen of Holland and mother of the Emperor Napoleon III. The news reached the Vicomte in Martinique. After waiting over three weeks he wrote to his wife



HORTENSE DE BEAUHARNAIS

After the painting by Prud'hon Photo by Levy et ses Fils



as follows, dropping for once the strain of calm and self-sufficient philosophy which was generally characteristic of his correspondence

“ If I had written to you in the first moment of my anger, my pen would have burnt the paper and you would have believed, on hearing my invectives, that I had chosen a moment of ill-temper or jealousy to write to you. But I have now known for three weeks or more what I am going to tell you. So, in spite of my soul’s despair, in spite of the rage which suffocates me, I shall contain myself, I shall tell you coldly that you are in my eyes the vilest of beings, that my stay in this country has made known to me your abominable conduct here, that I know the full details of your intrigue with M de Be——, an officer in the Martinique regiment, and that with M d’H, who sailed on the *César*, that I am aware of the means you took to satisfy yourself and the people whom you employed to get your opportunities, that Brigitte was only given her freedom to bind her to silence, and that Louis, now dead, was also in the secret, lastly, I know the contents of your letters and I will bring with me one of the presents which you gave. It is too late, there-

fore, for pretences and as nothing is unknown to me, there remains only one attitude for you to adopt, that of frankness As for repentance, I do not ask it of you, you are incapable of it A creature who could open her arms to her lover after the preparations had been made for her departure, when she knew she was destined to another, has no soul is lower than the worst of hussies Having been bold enough to reckon on the slumbers of her mother and her grand mother, it is not surprising that you [*sic*] knew how to deceive your father also at San Domingo I do them all justice and blame no one but you You alone could abuse a whole family and bring scandal and ignominy into a strange family which you were unworthy to enter After so many crimes and atrocious acts what can one think of the storms and the wrangles that arose in our household? What of this last child born eight months and a few days after my return from Italy? I am forced to accept it but I swear by the Heaven which enlightens me it is another's strange blood flows in its veins It shall never know my shame and I take my oath again it shall never discover either by its education or by its treatment that

it owes its being to an adulterer. But you recognise that I must avoid such a misfortune in future. Make your arrangements, therefore. Never, never will I put myself in the position of being abused again, and, since you are such a woman as to impose on the world if we lived under the same roof again, be good enough to betake yourself to a convent as soon as you receive my letter. This is my last word, and nothing in this universe can make me go back upon it. I will come to see you on my arrival in Paris, once only. I wish to have a talk with you and to return something to you. But I repeat to you no tears, no protestations. I am forearmed against all your attempts, and all my care will be devoted to arming myself still further against your base oaths, as contemptible as they are false. In spite of all the invectives that your fury will pour out against me, you know me, madam, you recognise that I am kind and feeling, and I know that in your inmost heart you will do me justice. You will persist in denial because from your earliest years you made falsehood a habit, but you will be none the less convinced, internally, that you have only got what you deserve. You probably are not

aware of the way in which I managed to unveil all these horrors and I shall only tell it to my father and your aunt. It will be enough for you to realise that men are very indiscreet most especially when they have cause for complaint. Besides, you wrote besides, you gave up M de Be——'s letters to his successor and then you employed persons of colour, whose indiscretion one can buy with money. So look upon the shame with which you and I as well as your children are about to be covered as a punishment from Heaven which you have deserved, it ought to gain for me your pity and that of all honourable hearts.

"Good bye madam. I am writing' to you in duplicate and the two letters will be the last which you will receive from your desperate and unhappy husband.

"P S —I leave to day for San Domingo, and I reckon on being in Paris in September or October if my health does not break down under the fatigue of a journey in conjunction with so terrible a state of affairs. I imagine that after this letter I shall not find you in my house and I must warn you that you would discover in me a tyrant if you did not follow my bidding precisely."

The man who wrote the above letter, which it has seemed worth while to quote in full, was the same who had before leaving France expressed his happiness at knowing for certain that his wife was a second time with child. Moreover, he could not well have forgotten that he had returned to Paris at the end of July 1782, and that the child was born on April 10 in the following year. What amount of sincerity there was in the charge with regard to the paternity of Hortense is obvious. As for the other accusations in his abominable letter, he could not well tell Josephine that he had derived his information from his present mistress. But probably he felt no compunction in hiding this fact from one who "from her earliest years had made falsehood a habit."

In August Alexandre de Beauharnais left Martinique, but not without hearing from Trois-Ilets. He had not concealed from his father-in-law with what feelings toward Josephine he was going home. Tascher wrote angrily to him, offering to take his daughter back, and bitterly attacking his conduct in Martinique. "So this is the result of your journey," he said, "and of the fine campaign which you were

counting on making against the enemies of the State You got as far as making war on your wife's good name and the peace of her family " For once Joseph Gaspard Tascher appears in a vigorous attitude even if it is only on paper

Beauharnais arrived in France early in October, having sent Josephine's traducer ahead of him to Paris The letter of accusation had reached Josephine at Noisy le Grand during her usual summer visit, and she had remained in her aunt's house to await events Mme Renaudin and the old Marquis had both sent messages to meet the husband on his landing, urging him to be reconciled But Alexandre was in no mood for reconciliation He merely wrote to Josephine expressing his astonishment that she had not yet retired to a convent and assuring her of the inflexibility of his resolution

" Could we live together after what I have learnt ? " he asked You would be made as unhappy as I by the constant thought of your misdeeds which you would know to be familiar to me And though you would be incapable of remorse would not the idea that your husband had obtained the right to despise you be at least humiliating to your self respect ? I

see no reason, if you wish to return to America, against allowing you to adopt this alternative, and you may choose between the return to your family and a convent in Paris ”

After stating that he would like to see the little Eugène, if he were sent to Paris, Alexandre added that nothing which his wife could do would cause him to alter his opinion. He feared, perhaps, that the desire to see Eugène might be interpreted as a sign of relenting, and he concluded.

“For the last six months I have spent all my time in hardening myself on this point. Submit yourself therefore, like me, to a painful course, to a separation which will hurt your children most of all, and be assured, madam, that of the two of us you are not the one most to be pitied ”

We know nothing of any replies which Josephine may have made to her husband's letters. On receipt of the last she hurried to Paris, in spite of his commands. To avoid the possibility of meeting her, the Vicomte had not gone to his own home, or rather his father's, in the rue Saint-Charles, but to two hired houses in succession, where he received with unwavering sternness all efforts in the direction of compromise from his father, his godmother, and many

well-meaning friends of the family At the same time he took proceedings to secure a separation At length in December, seeing that all attempts to improve the situation were in vain, Mme Renaudin made a decided step on her niece's behalf It was customary for ladies in Josephine's position to take refuge in a convent while judicial proceedings were pending At the abbey of Panthemont in the rue de Grenelle-Saint Germain at the time were several others in a similar plight Hither the aunt and niece went to lodge while a counter case against the Vicomte de Beauharnais was being prepared There was no difficulty in making out a very strong case Alexandre's neglect of Josephine had been notorious They had now been married for four years during which time he had spent ten months with her Previous to the Martinique visit he had been neglectful indifferent and actually unfaithful His conduct in Martinique had been worse than ever and his two letters of July 13 and October 20 1783 were put in as evidence against him He had no defence apart from what he might affect to believe of the stories of his wife's girlhood at Trois-Ilets With regard to Hortense's legiti

macy, he had already, as has been seen, destroyed his own argument by his expression of pleasure at the prospect of a second child before he left France for the West Indies. Furthermore, his family was entirely against him, including his father, his brother François, and his aunt Fanny de Beauharnais, who had herself retained the friendship of the Beauharnais clan, although separated from her elderly husband Comte Claude.

There was nothing for Alexandre to do but to yield to the inevitable. He consented to meet his wife at the lawyer's office in Paris on March 3, 1785, and there he withdrew his accusations against her and consented to a separation on terms very advantageous to her. Josephine's victory was complete, and the Vicomte made no effort to save the situation for himself. The only stipulation at all in his favour in the arrangement now made was that Eugène should pass to his father's custody after reaching the age of five years. In the meanwhile the father was to pay for his maintenance as he was to pay for that of Hortense throughout. He was to allow Josephine five thousand livres a year, while she was to receive

also the interest on her dowry and might live wherever she pleased. Except by obtaining an absolute divorce from her husband, Josephine could not have triumphed more thoroughly over the unworthy Vicomte, who undoubtedly paid heavily for listening to the slanders of his Martinique mistress and to his own desires to get rid of a wife whom he could not "educate" according to his ideas.

The subsequent history of the married life of Alexandre and Josephine de Beauharnais, down to their practical reconciliation, almost on the foot of the scaffold, is very curious. Writers interested in upholding the family credit of the Beauharnais and the Taschers have naturally tried to minimise the completeness of the estrangement. But the evidence is all against their contentions. As far as Josephine is concerned, it is unnecessary to attempt to show that she overlooked the offences committed against her by her husband. She had been terribly wronged, and her own conduct in the bonds of this unhappy union was in no way to blame, unless her inability to assimilate Alexandre's theories of education must be considered a fault.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BEGINNING OF INDEPENDENCE

HITHERTO Josephine's life had not been eventful. Brought up in lazy ignorance until the age of ten ; sent for four years to an indifferent convent school, where she learnt little but music and dancing ; then spending two more years at her father's island home, where she may have had a few childish love affairs ; she had been married at sixteen to a pompous young blackguard, who after a slight effort to train her according to his ideas studiously neglected her and grasped at the first opportunity which he thought he saw of putting her out of his way Of real education she had none, and of social polish hardly any except what she received from intercourse with her father-in-law and her aunt, and from the occasional meetings with her husband's aunt Up to the period of her separation she had

drifted through life or had been driven by others, inert, helpless, and scarcely articulate. No more unlikely candidate for a throne could well be imagined, few more improbable aspirants to a prominent place in the history of an exceptionally interesting period of time. Part of her insignificance is, of course, due to the fact that we can only see her through the medium of a few letters written by those who directed her fate up to the age of twenty-one, that we never hear her own words or receive any of her personal impressions of what went on around her. But it cannot be denied that during her first twenty one years of life she gave singularly little promise of deserving the attention of biographers.

It was at the abbey of Panthemont during her temporary retirement to await the result of the proceedings for a legal separation from her husband, that Josephine first learnt how to hold herself in society and to disguise the deficiencies of her education by reliance on her natural abilities, that she first learnt, in fact, to be herself as she afterwards became known to the world—the Vicomtesse de Beauharnais who captured the heart of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Her stay at the abbey brought her in contact with a section at least of the society to which her husband had not cared to introduce her. In this convent were to be met members of the upper classes who had, like her, trouble with their husbands ; orphans of good family who had no home to which to go , and unmarried ladies whose means did not enable them to live as well in the outside world, or who liked the religious air of the place combined with the liberty which other convents did not allow. Panthemont was a superior kind of " home for gentlewomen " of not too reduced circumstances, perfectly respectable and almost aristocratic in tone. Here, with her aunt to guide her in the choice of her acquaintances, Josephine spent a profitable year and a quarter, gaining an insight into the manners of society and making friendships which were destined to prove very useful to her afterwards.

In the August following her emergence from Panthemont, Josephine joined the Marquis de Beauharnais and the recently widowed Mme Renaudin at Fontainebleau. Here the Marquis had taken a country-house, having given up the Paris residence and the establishment at

Noisy-le-Grand His pension from the Government had lately been cut down to a quarter of its size, and he had also lost revenues in San Domingo, where Josephine's father had shown little ability in the management of his friend's estates Both he and Mme Renaudin were in ill health and welcomed the idea of a peaceful existence at Fontainebleau Society, however, was not wholly lacking, if that society was drawn chiefly from the bourgeoisie, the Comtesse Fanny de Beauharnais had a house close at hand, to give a tone to it and there were dances, theatricals and a hunt to supply Josephine with amusement With the care of her two children in addition, she found life fuller than it had hitherto been for her The separation had undoubtedly brought with it an improvement in her lot Moreover, there was no question of open hostility between herself and Alexandre There was, rather, a softening of the bitterness which had existed on one side at least, before husband and wife parted Gradually there came to be a weekly interchange of letters, in which they gave each other news of their children, for in September 1786 the five year-old Eugène went to his father, in

accordance with the arrangement of the previous year.

This quiet country life might have continued for some considerable time had it not been for the increase of the financial troubles of the family. Not only had the Marquis a dwindling income, but Mme. Renaudin had lost by her husband's death, while Alexandre had become involved in money difficulties and was behind-hand in his payments to his wife. From Martinique moneys came in very slowly through the hands of Joseph-Gaspard Tascher. There exists an interesting letter from Josephine to her father partly dealing with this question—one of the very few of the early letters from Josephine which have survived. Writing on May 20, 1787, she says.

“I have received, my dear papa, the bill of exchange for 2,789 livres which you entrusted to my uncle. Accept my entire thanks. It makes me hope that you are seriously trying to send me soon more considerable sums. This will be all the more pleasant for me, since they will bring peace to our minds and prevent us from making ruinous sacrifices to fulfil our obligations. You know me well enough, my

dear papa, to be quite sure that but for a pressing need of money I should speak to you of nothing but my fondest affection for you "

She goes on to talk of the little Hortense and of Eugène in a passage which deserves quotation, as the first example of the affectionate simplicity with which she, who has by some been denied the name of a loving mother, always spoke of her children

" I am occupied at the moment in looking after my daughter, whom M de Beauharnais wished to be inoculated I thought I ought not to oppose his request in this delicate situation up to the present I have nothing to reproach myself about, since the child is as well as could be desired She is my consolation, she is charming in face and in character, she already speaks often of her grandpapa and grandmamma La Pagerie She does not forget her aunt Manette and asks me ' Mamma, shall I see them soon ? Such is her prattle at the moment Eugène has been for four months at a school in Paris He is wonderfully well, he could not be inoculated because of his seven-year-old teeth, which are coming early, you see "

This letter, which is signed " La Pagerie de

Beauharnais," after the fashion of the time, shows Josephine in a kindly, artless light, as indeed she almost invariably appeared in her correspondence throughout life.

The "more considerable sums" for which Josephine hoped did not come over from Martinique, and in 1788 she determined to go on a visit to her parents. Is it necessary to imagine a dishonourable reason for her departure from Fontainebleau? It has been suggested that she had intrigues there which made it advisable, for the sake of her reputation, to leave. It is impossible to disprove the charge, but, on the other hand, there is nothing more than a mere guess upon which to base it. M. Masson writes, in his "*Joséphine de Beauharnais*". "In the absence of any documents one is reduced to conjecture, and the necessity for this mysterious and sudden journey, given the ideas which can be formed about Josephine's psychology, can only be looked for in one of two causes: love or debts." In fact, she had either made herself conspicuous in a love affair or she feared legal proceedings against her for debt, and in either case she was compelled to leave Fontainebleau. Such is M. Masson's

verdict Josephine might, however be given the benefit of the doubt—a privilege which is seldom hers It is true that a journey from France to Martinique, with her daughter of five, seems a rash proceeding if all she wanted was money from her father But Tascher was both ill and financially involved himself, and desperate measures may have seemed necessary to Josephine He and his wife, too, had often invited their daughter to come to them after the separation from Alexandre and may well have urged her more strongly of late Josephine was not totally destitute of natural feeling, as might be imagined from the fact that only a discreditable reason has generally been sought for her journey in 1788

Whatever her motive Josephine was anxious to quit France at the earliest possible moment On her arrival at Havre she lodged at a small house kept by two married people in humble circumstances by name Dubuc whose address had been given to her by M de Rougemont a banker friend A Government-owned vessel was proposed to her as her means of reaching Martinique but such was her impatience that hearing that this vessel was not sailing for

two weeks and that there was another, privately owned, starting at once, she managed to secure a passage on this for herself and Hortense. The only reminiscence which we find of this period is in the Memoirs of Mlle. Cochelet, who was afterwards attached to the household of Queen Hortense and visited Havre with her in September 1814. They found the home of the Dubucs, now a very old couple, whom Hortense likened to Philemon and Baucis. Mme Dubuc remembered well the visit of Josephine and her child, and how eager the former had been to sail. She recalled, too, a great storm which had overtaken the ship as it left Havre harbour, and how much the captain (a native of Havre, still living in 1814) had been struck by Josephine's courage—a statement which rather surprises us when we recollect that Josephine was a bad traveller and always complained of *migraine*, even on a land journey.

The two years of Josephine's life following her departure from Havre in June 1788 are without a record and must certainly have been very dull for her. The family at Trois-Ilets was badly off. Her father's health con-

tinued very poor Her sister Marie-Françoise who, had she not been so young ten years ago might have had the evil fate of marrying the Vicomte de Beauharnais, was also ailing—in consequence, it was said, of an unfortunate love affair, perhaps the same which had resulted in the birth of her illegitimate daughter afterwards known as Marie-Bénaquette Both father and daughter died before long, Joseph-Gaspard Tascher in November 1790, and Marie Françoise a year later Josephine however left Trois-Ilets before either death had taken place sailing for France again in September 1790

Her departure from Martinique was almost as sudden as had been her setting out, and the occasion for it is no better known Friends of the family attributed it to the reception of the news of her husband's rapid advance to the front rank in the Assembly According to them Josephine's early love for Alexandre de Beauharnais had never been extinguished and she was anxious to rejoin him as soon as he was in a position for her to do so Some even go so far as to make Alexandre summon her to him—a step which our acquaintance with his character hardly renders probable. Nor

was there any reunion between husband and wife, as such writers as Imbert de Saint-Amand, for instance, have imagined, after Josephine's return with her daughter to Paris. Still, it is likely that the return was partly influenced by intelligence of Alexandre's success.

Whatever the attraction in France, there were assuredly sufficient reasons to drive Josephine from Martinique. Debt and disease gripped the Taschers at Trois-Ilets, and social intercourse for them can hardly have existed. The whole island was in a state of turmoil through race feuds between the whites and blacks, and the spirit of revolution had already penetrated from France to her West Indian colonies. Fort-Royal was in the hands of rebels, and the French fleet had been driven by the captured guns to leave the harbour. The commander, who was a friend of the Beauharnais, offered to give Josephine a passage across the Atlantic. She accepted and arrived on board the frigate *Sensible* in so great a state of distress that clothing was actually provided for her and Hortense on the voyage. Sympathy, however, was readily extended to them, and we hear of the child being shod with a pair

in common and met in society speaking to one another when they did so and discussing their children's education a subject naturally very congenial to the Vicomte

This limited acquaintance which hardly deserves even Alexandre's favourite term *amitié* is very different from the picture drawn by Imbert de Saint-Amand for instance That amiable courtier writes that "Josephine experienced one of the greatest joys of her life in seeing her husband come back to the tender sentiments of the first days of their marriage and she settled down with him in Paris in the mansion which he then occupied in the rue de l'Université facing the rue de Portiers"<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact while Alexandre lived in the rue des Petits Augustins it was only Josephine and Hortense who lived in the rue de l'Université In the summer after her return to France she was joined by her son Eugène and went with the two children to stop with the old Marquis de Beauharnais and Mme Renaudin at Fontainebleau where they still resided.

Here the continued advance of Alexandre brought with it an increase of respect for his

<sup>1</sup> La Jeunesse de l'Impératrice Joséphine 27

family. Only three days after his election as President of the Assembly the task fell to him of announcing that the King and the Royal family had been "carried away by the enemies of the common weal." For the moment Alexandre himself almost stepped into the King's place, and it is recorded that when the boy Eugène walked about Fontainebleau he was greeted with cries of "Here comes the Dauphin!" Alexandre's appreciation of his position may be seen in a passage from a letter which he sent to his father on June 27. "I am exhausted with fatigue," he wrote, "but I find the necessary strength in my courage and in the hope that, deserving by my zeal a part of the praises which are showered on me, I may be able to be of service to the common weal and to the maintenance of the peace of the kingdom." The philosopher had no doubts about his performance of his duty, but looked upon himself as the patriot duly rewarded by the attainment of the highest honours.

When the summer came to an end, Josephine left Fontainebleau, and her return to Paris may be regarded as her first real launching into society. She included among her friends

Fanny de Beauharnais Mme de Genlis Charlotte Robespierre the Prince of Salm Kyrbourg and his sister Princess Amalie of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen The last-named in particular became very intimate with her and in her house Josephine and Alexandre must often have met She also renewed many acquaintances which she had made at Panthemont But there is no proof of the existence of a Beauharnais *salon* such as that with which the family biographers would credit Josephine In the first place she can hardly have had any funds on which to maintain a *salon* her father's death having caused a further decrease in the moneys coming from Martinique Nor could she expect aid from her husband impoverished as he was through the troubles in San Domingo Moreover, in September the Constituent Assembly came to an end and Alexandre after three months in a post in the provinces was ordered to rejoin his regiment He obeyed the order slowly, after writing to the Marquis de Beauharnais to ask for his fatherly blessing in the year just about to open so full of new dangers for his son In this letter Alexandre did not mention either Josephine or the children which

is perhaps a small piece of evidence against the theories of those who claim that there had been a full reconciliation between husband and wife

The career of the Vicomte de Beauharnais was approaching its end ; but he was destined before his fall to add some military honours to those which he had won in the civil sphere. For no very successful share in the operations on the Rhine and in the north of France he rose successively to be adjutant-general, brigadier-general, and chief of the staff at Strasbourg. Perhaps it was to his letters that his promotion was due, for he continued to pour out in communications to the new Assembly his reflections on all that passed around him, couched in his familiar style, talking ever of Liberty and of his devotion to his country. In May 1793 he was made Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Rhine, and a month later he was offered the Ministry of War. This he declined in a long letter declaring that to a man of his principles command was nothing, the honour of defending his country everything. The Government acquiesced and confirmed him in his post on the Rhine. But his enemies, who hated him as a *ci-devant* aristocrat, however

much he might boast of his *sans culotterie*, were always on the watch, and in July his failure, though at the head of sixty thousand men, to relieve Mayence gave them an opportunity Alexandre saw his danger and wrote to Paris, resigning his post. Belonging to the proscribed caste, he said, he felt it his duty to remove from the minds of his fellow citizens all reasons for uneasiness which might arise with regard to him in this time of crisis. He continued to urge the acceptance of his resignation, and finally abandoned his post and returned to Strasbourg, although fighting was in progress at the front. He pleaded illness, his enemies talked of an infatuation for the daughter of a commissariat officer at Strasbourg. In three days' time he returned to the front, where he received a letter from Paris accepting his resignation and ordering him to leave at six hours' notice.

Alexandre retired to his estate at Ferte Beauharnais, still preaching patriotism and speaking of his prayers for the happiness of his fellow-citizens. The fellow-citizens showed no gratitude, for on March 2, 1793, the Committee of Public Safety ordered his arrest and the seizure of his papers. On April 19, followed the arrest

of Josephine, who was described in the warrant as "*la nommée Beauharnais, femme du ci-devant général, rue Dominique 953.*"

Since the autumn of 1791 Josephine had divided her time between the house in the rue Saint-Dominique (otherwise the rue de l'Université), Fontainebleau, and the village of Croissy, whither she was first taken by Mme. Hosten Lamotte, a Creole of Saint-Lucia, who shared with her the expenses of her Paris house. Her stay at Croissy was of importance to her (apart from the fact that now for the first time she saw, and fell in love with, the neighbouring château of Malmaison), since it was here that she met Pierre-François Réal, destined afterwards to become a warm partisan of General Bonaparte in Italy and ultimately the Emperor's chief of police, but at present noted for his rather independent Republicanism. This man introduced Josephine at Croissy to Tallien, whose friendship was soon to prove so useful to her. Perhaps also through his acquaintance with the wife, Réal was induced to oppose the attack on Alexandre de Beauharnais, though he was unsuccessful in saving him from his fate.

The fall of the throne in August 1792, how-

ever much it strengthened her husband's position, naturally alarmed Josephine, and she hastened to send away her two children with the Princess Amalie to Saint-Martin in Artois, where the Prince of Salm-Kyrbourg had a country house. Eugène was quickly recalled by his father, who disapproved of Josephine's plan, and was placed at the National College at Strasbourg. During the residence of her children with the Princess the earliest extant letter from her mother to Hortense was written. As an example of Josephine's correspondence with her daughter this document is interesting.

"Your letter, she wrote, 'gave me much pleasure, my dear Hortense, I quite appreciate the sorrow which you show at being separated from your mamma. But, my child, it is not for long, I hope that the Princess will return in the spring, or I will come and fetch you. Oh! how clever you will be when you return, how well the Princess will speak of my little children! I have no need to bid you love her well. I see by your letter that you are very grateful to her for all her goodness to you and your brother. Prove it to her often, my dear, this is the way to please me.

“ I feel much pain at being separated from you and am not yet consoled for it , I love my little Hortense with all my heart. Embrace Eugène for me.

“ Farewell, my child, my Hortense ; I embrace you with all my heart, and I love you just the same.

“ Your fond mother,

“ JOSÉPHINE DE BEAUHARNAIS ”

Having removed her children to a place of safety, Josephine went to Paris as usual for the winter season, and the list of her acquaintances in society grew larger and larger. The faculty which she was developing for accommodating herself to very varied surroundings proved most useful to her. She managed to be on good terms alike with those in power, with whom her position as wife of Beauharnais no doubt had weight, and with those to whom her own inclinations attracted her, both such of the nobility who still dared live in Paris and those who made the pursuit of frivolous pleasures their chief end, whatever the circumstances of the time. Dangers were threatening on all sides, but Josephine manifested at least no outward alarm

on her own behalf Still, it would be interesting to know what ground M Masson has for stating <sup>1</sup> that beside living a double or treble life in society, she wandered also into less respectable circles "This is the only explanation which can be given," he says, "of her tranquil confidence in the midst of the perils about her" It may be an explanation, but where is the evidence? Her subsequent conduct may seem to render it likely that she was not particular in the choice of her associates But at present she must have been discreet in her lapses, if there were lapses, or there would surely be more than the vague calumnies of her enemies in later years on which to base a charge against her

Neither her extensive acquaintances, however, nor her adaptability to circumstances preserved Josephine from danger long The Law of Suspects of September 1793 required all good citizens to prove their *civisme* It was necessary also to have a domicile outside Paris to obtain a certificate Josephine decided to take up her residence at Croissy Here she was joined by Hortense and by Eugène, whose school at Strasbourg had closed, leaving him homeless

Further proofs of good citizenship seemed advisable, so Hortense was apprenticed to a dressmaker and Eugène to the carpenter Cochard at Croissy.

Fortified, as she hoped, by her display of *civisme*, and with a duly signed certificate, Josephine returned to the rue Saint-Dominique in January, and began a campaign of solicitation of the influential on behalf of those in whom she was interested. This became one of her greatest hobbies throughout the rest of her life and did perhaps more than anything else to gain for her the title of *la bonne Joséphine*. But her early attempts were hardly fortunate. One letter calls for quotation in full, as an example both of Josephine's "Republican" style and of her outwardly expressed opinion of her husband, though nominally it was a petition on behalf of her sister-in-law, who had been imprisoned in Sainte-Pélagie. François de Beauharnais, the uncompromising monarchist, nicknamed "No-Amendment Beauharnais" owing to his opposition to all proposals and modifications of proposals made in the Assembly to limit the King's power, had joined the *émigrés* in 1792, and his wife was naturally suspect.

Josephine, although never on intimate terms with her sister-in-law, took upon herself to write to Vadier, President of the Committee of Public Safety, in the following strain

PARIS 28 *nivôse* Year II of the French Republic  
one and indivisible

' LIBERTY                      EQUALITY

'Lapagerie-Beauharnais to Vadier, representative of the people,

"Greeting, esteem, confidence, fraternity

"Since it is impossible to see you, I hope that you will consent to read the memorandum which I attach Your colleague has told me about your severity but at the same time he has told me about your pure and virtuous patriotism and how, in spite of your suspicions concerning the citizenship of the ex nobles you always take an interest in the unhappy victims of a mistake

"I am sure that on reading the memorandum your humanity and sense of justice will lead you to take into consideration the position of a wife in every way unhappy, but only because she belonged to an enemy of the Republic, to Beauharnais the elder, whom you knew and who in the Constituent Assembly was in opposition

to Alexandre, your colleague and my husband. I should feel much regret, Citizen Representative, if you were to confound in your mind Alexandre and Beauharnais the elder. I put myself in your place. You are right in suspecting the patriotism of the ex-nobles, but it is in the realms of possibility that among them are to be found ardent friends of Liberty and Equality. Alexandre has never strayed from these principles. He has constantly marched straight ahead. Were he not a Republican, he would have neither my esteem nor my friendship. I am an American, and in his family only know him, and if I were allowed to see you, you would abandon your suspicions. My household is a Republican household; before the Revolution my children were not different from the *Sans-culottes*, and I hope that they will prove worthy of the Republic.

“ I write to you frankly, I write as a *Sans-culotte Montagnarde*. I only lament your severity because it has debarred me from seeing you and having a little talk with you. I ask of you neither favour nor concession, but I claim your good feeling and humanity on behalf of an unhappy citizeness. If I have been deceived

in the picture drawn for me of her situation and if she was suspect and appeared to you so, I beg you to pay no attention to what I say to you, for I like you am inexorable But do not confuse your old colleague with another Be assured that he is worthy of your esteem

In spite of your refusal I applaud your severity as far as I am concerned, but I cannot applaud your suspicions about my husband You see that your colleague has repeated to me all that you told him he had doubts like you, but seeing that I only lived among Republicans, he ceased to doubt You would be as just you would cease to doubt if you had consented to see me

Farewell estimable citizen you have my entire confidence

“LAPAGERIE BEAUHARNAIS

46 rue Saint Dominique, faubourg Saint Germain

The effect which this remarkable appeal had upon old Vadier widely known as “Sixty Years of Virtue,” may be gathered from the facts that he was the first to sign the order for the arrest of Alexandre de Beauharnais and that he was the man who insisted so strongly on the existence of the “conspiracies” in prison for

complicity in which Alexandre was executed six months later

From the tone of her letter to Vadier it is clear that Josephine had wind of danger menacing her husband ; and it was but ten weeks after she had written it that Alexandre was taken to Les Carmes. In another six weeks Josephine herself followed him. An anonymous accusation denounced "the *ci-devant* Vicomtesse de Beauharnais, who has many secret means of information in the ministerial offices," and on April 19 an order was made out for the arrest of her and her fellow householder, Mme Hosten. Two days later two members of the Revolutionary Committee called at 46 rue Saint-Dominique and demanded that Josephine should produce all her papers and correspondence. After an examination of these they certified that they had found nothing inimical to the interests of the Republic, "but on the contrary a number of patriotic letters which can only be to the credit of this citizeness." In a cupboard, however, they discovered a collection of letters of the citizen Beauharnais, which they sealed up for reference. And Josephine and Mme. Hosten were taken to Les Carmes.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE

IN the squalid and gloomy prison of Les Carmes the former convent in the rue Vaugiraud Josephine spent one hundred and eight days from April 21 to August 6 1794 or according to the revolutionary calendar, the 2 *floreale* to the 19 *thermidor an II*. In Les Carmes there was collected a herd of seven hundred people men women and even children of all classes and conditions from the Prince of Salm-Kyrbourg to followers of the humblest professions. Within the walls all was dirty damp and dark. The cells were ill lighted and heavily barred and led into black passages, whereby the wretched prisoners at stated times in the day went to their meals in the ancient refectory first the men and then the women the former bare necked and bare legged unshaved and unkempt the latter clad in a single





robe of cotton stuff Josephine was lodged in a cell on the first floor, seven and a half by thirty feet in size, with a vaulted roof and an iron-barred window looking out on what was once the convent garden. It was a cell of most dismal associations, for on the wall were the outlines of three swords in blood, made by the Septembrists of 1792 after they had massacred Dulau, Archbishop of Arles, and his fellow-prisoners. The "chamber of the swords," as it was called, was the most grim of all the cells in the whole grim building.

Solitary confinement, however, was not part of the prison system at Les Carmes, rather from lack of space than from considerations of humanity. Josephine shared her room with the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, afterwards Mme Louis de Girardin. Moreover, there was a certain amount of intercourse between the inmates of the various cells. Josephine and Alexandre de Beauharnais saw one another often enough to effect at last some kind of a reconciliation. From the letters which the two wrote from prison to their children this is clear, and in one Josephine actually tells Hortense of her expectation of meeting her husband in three hours' time.

They appear to have met other captives too for their enemies told of Josephine's relations in Les Carmes with General Hoche arrested eight days before her and of Alexandre's with a young lady called Delphine de Custine

Husband and wife were not forbidden to write to their children, and on their side Eugene and Hortense now aged twelve and eleven respectively worked their hardest on behalf of their parents. According to the story they were able to introduce into the prison Josephine's pet pug Fortuné who was used after this to convey to and fro private messages tucked under his collar. They also addressed petitions in May and June to the Convention and the Committee of Public Safety. Their plea to the Convention on Josephine's behalf is a strange document

"Two innocent children beg of you citizen representatives the freedom of their fond mother of their mother against whom no reproach can be brought except the misfortune of entering a class to which she has proved that she considers herself a stranger, since she has never mixed except with the best of patriots and the most excellent *Montagnards*. After she had

asked for her permit to submit herself to the law of the 26 *germinal*, she was arrested without being able to guess the reason. Citizen representatives, you will not suffer the oppression of innocence, patriotism, and virtue. Restore life, citizen representatives, to two unhappy children. Their age is not meant for sorrow."

Who inspired this appeal, with its protestation of Josephine's contempt for the nobility, for which in reality she exhibited such warm feelings throughout her life? It cannot have been the two children themselves who composed the petition. Probably they wrote it at the dictation of Calmelet, a business man employed by Josephine in many confidential affairs and handsomely rewarded by her in later years.

Such poor efforts could not save Josephine. Neither the citizen representatives nor the Committee of Public Safety were open to appeals to their tender feelings, for they had none. If there was the slightest evidence against an ex-noble, he or she was doomed, and among the Beauharnais papers, if not in Josephine's personal correspondence, there can hardly fail to have been something which might be twisted so

as to compromise her. According to a common story Josephine was one of the people saved by the erratic humanitarian La Bussière who preserved a number of prisoners' lives destroying their *dossiers* by the simple method of chewing them up. Josephine herself appears to have believed this story for she made a point of attending a benefit to La Bussière at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre in 1803 and of contributing to a fund on his behalf.

The captives in Les Carmes had little hope of escaping death however. When the question of clearing the over crowded prison arose *Sixty-Years-of-Virtue* Josephine's "estimable citizen Vadier called for drastic measures. His wishes prevailed. Some fifty prisoners were accused of plotting to escape among them being Alexandre de Beauharnais. All but three were condemned to death and on July 23 the guillotine ended the life of Josephine's first husband. He left behind him a letter addressed to his wife but evidently intended also for the publication which it actually received in the journals of the day. As a last monument of the style of Beauharnais that letter is given here.

“All appearances from the kind of cross-examination to which a sufficiently large number of prisoners were to-day subjected show that I am the victim of the villainous calumnies of several aristocrats, so-called patriots from this establishment. The presumption that this infernal plot will follow me as far as the Revolutionary Tribunal leaves me no hope of seeing you again, my friend, or of embracing my dear children I will not talk of my regrets My loving affection for them, the brotherly attachment which binds me to you, can leave you in no doubt as to feelings with which, in this respect, I shall take leave of life.

“I equally regret my separation from a country which I love, for which I would have given my life a thousand times, and the fact that not only can I serve her no longer but also she will think me a bad citizen as she sees me torn from her breast. This agonising thought cannot but cause me to recommend to your care my memory Strive to rehabilitate it by proving that a whole life devoted to the service of one's country and to the triumph of Liberty and Equality must, in the people's eyes, refute the words of hateful calumniators, especially

as they are picked from among the suspects This task must be postponed for during the storms of a revolution a great nation struggling to shatter its chains must gird itself about with a righteous mistrustfulness and fear rather to overlook the guilty than to strike at the innocent

“ I shall die with a calm which fails not, however, to be touched by the tenderest affections , but with a courage characteristic of a free man, with a pure conscience, and an honourable spirit, whose most passionate prayers are for the welfare of the Republic

“ Good bye, my friend , find consolation in my children, console them by instructing them, and above all by teaching them that it is by means of virtue and the quality of a citizen that they must efface the memory of my fate and recall my services and my titles to the gratitude of the nation Good bye, you know those whom I love Be their consoler and by your care prolong my life in their hearts Good bye , for the last time in my life I press you and my dear children to my breast

“ ALEXANDRE B ”

It is amusing to read the remarks of Imbert

de Saint-Amand <sup>1</sup> upon the death of the Vicomte de Beauharnais—

“ this man who had sacrificed everything for the Republic, this patriot with a true Spartan’s language and conduct, Alexandre de Beauharnais, the *grand seigneur*, who on the night of August 4, 1789, had so cheerfully renounced his title of Vicomte and his privileges of birth, this man of the old *régime* who devoted himself with such enthusiasm to the new ideas, this general who commanded so bravely the Republican armies, this aristocrat who made himself a name as a *Sans-culotte* and a *Montagnard*. ”

The remark “ as lying as an obituary ” surely seems appropriate here !

The news of Alexandre’s execution was not immediately conveyed to his wife When she heard of it, she broke down completely, whether through grief or in expectation of her own speedy death One story, preserved by Mlle. Ducrest,<sup>2</sup> maintains that her execution was indeed contemplated and that the gaoler entered her cell and told her that he was about to

<sup>1</sup> “ La Jeunesse de l’Impératrice Joséphine,” p 48.

<sup>2</sup> “ Mémoires,” chap. xxxiii.

remove her bed of sacking to give to another prisoner "What!" asked her room mate, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, "is Mme de Beauharnais to have a new bed?" "No, she will have no need of one," was the answer. But so ill was Josephine that a Polish doctor who was called in only gave her a week more to live. In consequence she was not brought before the Tribunal on the 10 *thermidor* as intended. And on the 9 *thermidor* Robespierre fell. Had he fallen a few days earlier the Vicomte de Beauharnais would have been saved as well as his wife.

Josephine's own account of how the news of the 9 *thermidor* reached Les Carmes is given by Mlle Ducrest and it may be noted that it does not support the story of Josephine's serious illness. This is the account.

"Mme d'Aiguillon feeling rather ill, I led her to the window, which I opened to give her a little air. I noticed a woman of the people who made a number of signs which we could not understand. She kept on clutching her dress, but we did not know what she meant. Seeing that she still continued, I called out to her 'Robe?' She signalled, Yes. Then she

picked up a stone and put it in her skirt, which she showed to us again, holding the stone in the other hand ' *Pierre ?* ' I called to her. Great was her pleasure at finding that we understood her. Then putting her *robe* and the stone together, she made the sign several times quickly of cutting off her head and began straight away to dance and clap. This strange pantomime produced in us a feeling impossible to express, for we ventured to think that she was giving us news of the death of Robespierre. At this moment, when we were thus between fear and hope, we heard a great noise in the corridor and the voice of the turnkey calling to his dog, as he kicked him : ' Get along, Robespierre ! ' A few minutes later we saw coming in our companions in misfortune, who told us the details of the great event. It was the 9 *thermidor*."

The removal of Robespierre brought relief from the fear of immediate death, but it was not followed at once by the release of the captives in Les Carmes. It was ten days later before Josephine was set free, and she was among the earliest to leave the prison. Her fortune was applauded by her companions, it

was said, and she quitted them amid blessings from all. Yet, curiously, we are also told that she was conspicuous at Les Carmes for the utter abandonment of her grief. She had already cut her hair short in preparation for the scaffold, and her loud lamentations caused the other women to blush for her, deploring, while pitying, her lack of courage. But, as M. Masson observes, Josephine's attitude was more genuine than that of the rest, whose calm courage was less influential in putting an end to the Reign of Terror than was her womanly grief. Had more been like her, the heart of Paris would have relented sooner.

The credit for obtaining Josephine's release has been variously attributed. The common story is that it was due to the Marquise de Fontenay, afterwards known as Mme Tallien, whom many have made Josephine's prison companion. But Teresia de Fontenay was at the Petite-Force, not at Les Carmes. She may have known Josephine, and she left her prison a week before Josephine left hers, so that it is not impossible that she might have worked on her behalf. But there is no apparent reason why she should have done so. On the other

hand, in the Memoirs of Eugène de Beauharnais it is stated that Tallien himself helped Josephine to freedom. He had met her at Croissy through the introduction of Réal, as we have seen, and after her restoration to liberty was evidently on very friendly terms with her. Moreover, it was much more likely that he, rather than his future wife, should have the power to help her now.

On August 6, 1794, Josephine was a free woman once again, after more than one hundred agonising days with the fear of the guillotine constantly before her. She emerged in poverty and a widow, but with the satisfaction that she had her life and her children left, and that, before his death, the husband whom she had once loved sufficiently to be jealous about him had been reconciled to her. It seems impossible to deny that she must have had feelings of regard remaining for the Vicomte de Beauharnais, for she certainly showed in some ways a respect for his memory which his conduct toward her hardly deserved. She was not by any means an inconsolable widow—that was not in her temperament—but that she took pains in the rehabilitation of his name is beyond

doubt There is extant a letter written by her to Debry, member of the Convention, thanking him on behalf of herself and her children for his allusion on 12 *fructidor* to the death of Beauharnais

"The first solace which we have felt in our misfortune," she said, "has been to hear that you did justice in the midst of the Convention to a virtuous Republican who fell a victim to aristocracy You have a heart able to appreciate the gratitude of his widow and children We honour you for this, and, to enlighten you still further concerning him whom we mourn, we send you a copy of his last letter You will see that as he approached the end of a life entirely devoted to the Revolution, and at a moment when men have no more interest in hiding their real sentiments, it was a pleasure to him to expound still further the ardent love of country which never ceased to animate him "

Still more striking as a testimonial to the forgivingness of her nature is the step which Josephine took six years later, when she interested herself in a girl of thirteen years of age whose only recorded name is Marie-Adelaïde This was an illegitimate daughter of Alexandre

de Beauharnais Her mother is unknown, but it is suggested that she was Josephine's traducer in Martinique, whom Beauharnais had brought back to France in 1783 If this was actually the case, Josephine's return of good for the evil which her husband had done her was remarkable. She put the child under the guardianship of Calmelet, and when she was seventeen gave her, with a trousseau and a handsome dowry, in marriage to a Captain Lecomte Pardon for the offences of Alexandre de Beauharnais could hardly have gone further.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WIDOW BEAUHARNAIS

THE period upon which Josephine entered after her release from Les Carmes is one which adds no credit to her reputation, although it is the period in which she accomplished that which has given her her place in history, the feat of capturing the affections of Napoleon Bonaparte. Her unconscious preparation for the conquest of the heart of a genius was of a kind which would scarcely seem to promise success. The utmost efforts of friendly biographers cannot save her name even by the complete ignoring of all evidence unfavourable to her manner of life during the years 1794-6. The best that can be said is that this life, while very different from what her eulogists would have us believe it to have been,<sup>1</sup> was not so

<sup>1</sup> Aubenas for instance claims that during the fifteen months following the 9 *thermidor* Josephine's existence was passed "in a very restrained society composed of the friends



BARRAS

From a lithograph by Delpeche



bad as personal enemies, anti-Imperialists, and professional scandal-mongers would make it out to be. Happily for her, some of her worst enemies, such as Barras, defeated their own ends by the very blackness of the picture which they painted of her. She was not the most notorious figure in the reign of license which followed the end of the Terror. But she was not, either, one of those who remained inconspicuous by the respectability of their lives.

Josephine's good name had been attacked by a few rumours even before her imprisonment. They were scarcely more precise, however, than the insinuations sure, in an epoch of malicious gossip, to be made against a young woman living apart from her husband. Nor can the association with her aunt have tended to her advantage, whatever the charms of Mme. Renaudin's mind and pen. It seems only just to date Josephine's abandonment of moral propriety from the time when she left Les Carmes, almost resourceless and with two fatherless children on her hands. In her distress she

whom the Revolution had left her and those whom prison had given her " Restraint is a quality of which the traces are hard to discover.

turned to the easiest means at the disposal of a fascinating woman to protect herself against poverty

Gossip assigned to her General Hoche as her first lover and would make out that she commenced an intrigue with him within the very walls of Les Carmes. It is difficult to see how her relations with him could possibly be close inside the prison. There is a tale of her signalling from her cell to his by means of a mirror, the number of executions which if true would be an ingenious device rather than a criminal intrigue. Hoche was only four weeks at Les Carmes with Josephine. Arrested eight days before her he was transferred to the Conciergerie on May 16. He was released two days before her and on August 16 was appointed Commander-in Chief of the Army centred at Cherbourg. Although he did not take up his post until the first week in September it is nevertheless clear that the time in which he and Josephine were supposed to have illicit relations was indeed short. Furthermore, he had only been married in the previous February and report made him much in love with his young wife. It is doubtful whether very much importance would be at

tached to the story of Josephine's connection with him were it not for the assertions of Barras. Now it cannot be said that a reading of the *Memoirs* of this infamous man disposes us to consider his statements trustworthy evidence.<sup>1</sup>

What Barras says would, indeed, hardly be worth repeating, except as an example of what a man of his character could write with an eye to publication. Speaking of the victim of his malice at the time when she first met Bonaparte, he says :<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. George Duruy, editor of the "*Mémoires de Barras*" (1895), says in his General Introduction, p. xxix "It will be enough to cast one's eyes over the article in the *Biographie* [Michaud] and the two letters from Josephine to Barras published by the Commission which undertook the task of hunting through the papers of the Emperor Napoleon III. after September 4, 1870, to convince oneself that, whatever insinuations the *Memoirs* of Barras contain, they reveal nothing that has not long ago been made public." M. Duruy adds that it is unhappily only too certain that Josephine let herself be carried away by weakness "until a deep feeling (and one probably new to her) purified her from these 'vices of the age' and converted the too readily consoled widow of Alexandre de Beauharnais into the irreproachable consort of the First Consul and the Emperor. The fact that the coquettish and frivolous friend of Mme. Tallien could not, without leaving some of her good name behind, go through an epoch like that of the Directory, when public morals had sunk so low and feminine virtue had inevitably been exposed to the influence of the universal corruption—this fact, whether one likes it or not, is a part of history."

<sup>2</sup> "*Mémoires*," II chap. iv.

“ Mme Bonaparte was reputed to have some influence with me. Some believed that she had been my mistress, others that she still was. What is certain is that she had been the patient mistress, in the sight of the whole world of General Hoche *e di tutti quanti*. It is not on that account to be said that she did not love General Hoche more than the others. This can readily be believed. He was our best soldier and one of our handsomest men, more a Hercules than an Apollo in build. Whether or not it was from ambition rather than love—since she deceived him as she deceived the rest—Mme Beauharnais pushed her pretensions to Hoche so far as to wish him to procure a divorce in order to marry her. He had repulsed with horror this suggestion of a divorce, saying in no uncertain tone to Mme Beauharnais that a man might temporarily go so far as to take a slut as his mistress, but he would not therefore make her his lawful wife.”

Barras continues that long before Hoche's discussion of the matter with him, the General had discovered that “ Mme Beauharnais did not even respect the sentiment with which she was most penetrated”, and he pretends to

quote a letter in which Hoche writes : " As for Rose " (i. e. Josephine), " she must cease from troubling me henceforth I relinquish all claims upon her in favour of Vanakre, my ostler "—to whom Barras alleges that Josephine gave a portrait of herself in a gold locket attached to a gold chain

Finally Barras states that Hoche said to him : " It is owing to my having been in prison with her before the 9 *thermidor* that I knew her so intimately. This would be unpardonable in a man restored to freedom "

There is no reason to suppose that Barras would scruple to invent conversations with Hoche in support of his aspersions on Josephine, his memoirs betraying numerous traces of similar procedure, especially where Napoleon is concerned. But the belief in the temporary connection with Hoche does not rest on the assertions of Barras alone. The story was widely spread. Not unnaturally, positive evidence is not forthcoming. No significance surely is to be attached to the fact that Hoche put Eugène Beauharnais upon his staff, for Hoche had served with the Vicomte on the Rhine and may well have been on friendly terms with the Beauharnais

family already, as he evidently was later when he wrote a letter to the old Marquis in July 1796 in which he spoke of being "unwilling to leave Paris without embracing his dear Eugène" Hoche's reputation it may be added was not bad, for the period although Arnault describes him as having 'a face which a man of gallant life might envy'

We may leave for the moment however, the subject of Josephine's moral conduct (to which it will be necessary to go back when we come to the period of her intimacy with Barras himself) and turn to her general circumstances in the latter part of the year 1794 She found herself in financial straits far worse than she had hitherto experienced The Vicomte's property had been confiscated and her own resources were temporarily at an end Even if her mother had had money to send her not only was the sea in English hands but Martinique itself had fallen Fort-Royal being captured in February and the Governor (Rochambeau) capitulating soon afterwards Josephine's uncle the Baron de Tascher, had surrendered with his chief and had retired to his estate while his sister in law still struggled against debt at Trois-Îlets

Josephine does not appear to have been able for some time to acquaint her mother with her painful position, for the first letter discovered by Aubenas is one dated November 20, 1794. In this she announced that she had been a widow for four months, but did not ask for money. According to Aubenas, Josephine was now dependent on charity, and naturally he repudiates the idea that she had recourse to lovers. That she borrowed largely is established. Her principal known creditors were Marie Lanoy, her former *femme de chambre*, and her family; and a Dunkerque merchant named Emmery, who had probably had dealings in sugar with the Taschers. Emmery was mayor of his town and in a good position, for he agreed to advance quite large sums to Josephine. An excellent testimonial to his kindness to her is to be found in her letter to her mother on New Year's Day 1795, wherein she wrote

“ You have doubtless heard of the misfortunes which have befallen me, leaving me and my children with no means of subsistence except your charity alone. I am a widow, deprived of my husband's fortune, as are his children. You see, my dear mamma, what need I have

to come to you Without the care of my good friend Emmery I do not know what I should have done I am too certain of your affection to have the least doubt about the anxiety which you will show to procure me the means of living and of showing my gratitude by paying back what I owe to M Emmery "

She begged that whatever Mme Tascher could raise for her, even by disposing of capital should be sent to Hamburg or London bankers who could transmit to Dunkerque Mme Tascher sent some money but evidently not very much for Josephine continued to write for further funds to enable her to meet her obligations The law of the 8 *pluviôse* afforded her some relief since it allowed her to recover the property furniture clothes etc, which had been hers and her children's before her imprisonment She returned therefore to a semblance of her former state in the rue de l'Université

Possibly if she had now attempted to economise Josephine might have put her affairs straight But it is no exaggeration to say that from the moment when she left Les Carmes to the day of her death she was never for a moment

free of debt, enormous though the sums were with which she was later furnished. At the present moment it was very easy for her to live beyond her means. Out of the money which Marie Lanoy lent her she hired a carriage, and a good proportion of Emmery's loans was spent on dress, flowers, and the like, although the price of everything, necessities or luxuries, was extremely high and the value of money very low. Only in the matter of food do we hear of any attempt to cut down expenses. She dined out regularly. Provisions were dear, like everything else in 1795, and guests were expected to supply their own bread. The tale is well known how at the house of Mme de Moulins, where a place was always laid for her, Josephine alone was allowed to come without bread. She was probably herself responsible for this reminiscence of her poverty, for she was fond in later life of telling how she had once been indebted for her daily bread.

Her departures from Paris were occasioned by her need for money.<sup>1</sup> In July we find her

<sup>1</sup> The whole story of Josephine's financial difficulties in 1795 is an intricate one. Those who are interested in it may be referred to M. Masson's "*Joséphine de Beauharnais*," chap. xvii, where he goes into the matter very fully. He says

at Fontainebleau where she persuaded Mme Renaudin to advance her in the name of her children fifty thousand livres in paper-money unfortunately only worth about one thousand five hundred in cash. Part of this money she was obliged to pay out almost immediately as her contribution to the forced loan of the Year IV. Then in the autumn<sup>1</sup> we see her in Hamburg on a visit to the banker Matthiessen who

(p. 256) 'It can be gathered how precarious and difficult was Josephine's position during the greater part of the Year III. It was not until *prairial* [end of April] that she saw a glimmer of light nor until *messidor* [July] that she obtained help from her aunt and how small was that help—the louis d'or of 24 livres was then worth 808 livres in paper money. It was only at the end of the year in the second month of the Year IV that she drew on her mother for 25 000 livres. But of these 25 000 livres how much did she owe to Emmery? Since 1792 she had lived on her borrowings. You can judge from this she wrote to her mother from Hamburg 'that I am indebted to him for considerable sums. And this was not her only debt. She owed to every one and on all sides. But this was her element and did not prevent her from living.

It is only fair to add that seven years later she lent Emmery and his partner 200 000 francs and refused to take any interest.

<sup>1</sup> Aubenas makes her visit Hamburg toward the end of October and gives the date of her letter to her mother as October 30. But according to the short note on p. 143 Josephine was in Paris on October 28 and invited Napoleon to lunch with her on the 29th. Presumably Aubenas would dismiss such notes as apocryphal but we have no means of checking his date for the Hamburg letter which if correct would prove the note attributed to Josephine on p. 143 a forgery.

had married a niece of Mme de Genlis and was well disposed toward the French. She had asked her mother, as has been mentioned, to remit to Hamburg or London, for greater safety. She now drew on Mme Tascher, by Emmery's advice, three bills, amounting in all to twenty-five thousand livres

Between her necessary expenses, such as the contribution to the forced loan, and her outlay on the luxuries always dear to her, Josephine had no difficulty in getting rid of the sums which she managed to raise from various sources<sup>1</sup> But it cannot be said that she entirely wasted her time, if we take into consideration the social acquaintances which she made. They were decidedly useful, if not from the point of view of character desirable. It was in the latter part of 1794 that she became intimate with the lady known as Mme Tallien, though it is possible that she may have met her before they both nearly fell victims to the

<sup>1</sup> Aubenas's comment seems worth quotation. "So it was to her friends at Dunkerque and Hamburg, to her mother, and not to others, that in her honourable misery the brave mother of a family addressed herself" (*"Histoire de l'Impératrice Joséphine,"* 266) Aubenas does not go into the question how Josephine spent her money

Terror The former Teresia Cabarrus was twelve years Josephine's junior and her superior in beauty, but had many points of likeness to her, both being elegant women, fond of luxury and reckless in expenditure, not too brilliant in intellect, nor at all scrupulous as to the way in which they kept themselves afloat in the very troubled seas of the Revolution. Teresia was not a native of France any more than Josephine. Born at Saragossa, she had divided her childhood between Madrid and Carabanchel (afterwards the home of the Countess of Montijo and her daughter, the Empress Eugénie), and had gone to Paris to finish her education. The old Marquis de Fontenay had fallen in love with her and married her, but the Revolution had torn her from him, and only her fascination of Tallien had saved her life. She was not contented with being only Mme Tallien, and rumour credited her with many *liaisons* beside that with Barras. One of her friends was Perregaux, at whose house the Comte de Gervinus records meeting her in June 1795, the other guests including Tallien, Mme de Beauharnais, and a number of financial people whom it was doubtless a great advantage

for those whose expenditure exceeded their incomes to know.

The acquaintance with Mme. Tallien was of immense service to Josephine. Mme. Tallien appears to have been remarkably free from jealousy, for she not only allowed Tallien to interest himself in the restitution to Josephine of Alexandre de Beauharnais's property, but also introduced her to Barras, President of the Convention and member both of the Committee of Five and the Committee of Public Safety. At what date the introduction took place is uncertain, but they were intimate in the middle of 1795. Facts are against Aubenas's "brave mother of a family." In August she gave up her home in the rue de l'Université and hired a mansion in the rue Chantereine at an annual rental of 10,000 francs in paper-money. No 6 rue Chantereine, the property of Julie Carreau, wife of Talma, was not a large house, but it had a stable and a small garden attached to it and required three or four servants to look after it. More furniture was also necessary, and Josephine never furnished on a humble scale. If she had not already been heavily in debt, we might suppose that she used the money

which she borrowed from her aunt in July to rent and furnish her new house. But this money was wanted elsewhere. Moreover, at the same time she decided to send Hortense to school with the fashionable Mme Campan at Saint-Germain en-Laye and Eugène to the neighbouring Collège Irlandais. Thus she was involving herself in large additional expenditure (and part of it at least cash expenditure) at a time when her personal resources were particularly scanty. Every one believed her to be getting the money from Barras, and there appears no reason to doubt that this was so.

Barras returned from a mission to the north just before Josephine took her new house, and was already master of affairs in Paris, though he did not actually become a Director until November 1. In the absence of abler men, he had sufficient strength to seize for a time the place which was waiting for some one to take it. He had just the character to which the moment offered its opportunity. As A. V. Arnault writes "The call for courage and audacity gave him his chance, which he could not get before, when he was lost amid a crowd of people who could talk but could not act."

Barras at least was resolute and not destitute of personal bravery, as he had proved in his early career in India and at Toulon. He had, moreover, a good address and good looks. That he was unscrupulous did not mark him off from the other men of his day. His social preferences did not stand in his way ; in fact, his tastes were easy to gratify and personally advantageous to him. Among men he drew the line against no one, whatever his record or his reputation, so long as he promised to be of service. Among women he would associate only with the well bred and elegant—and, naturally, the beautiful and yielding. The Revolution provided him with both needy men ready to do his bidding and reduced ladies willing to gratify his desires. He rewarded both not so much by direct payment as by helping them to pay themselves through the introductions which he was able to give them. Liking so well the accompaniments of power, the pomp and the luxury, he was not unwilling that his creatures should share them. This was the extent to which generosity was developed in a character incapable of true appreciation of the worth of others. Really estimable

traits are not to be looked for in Barras His Memoirs show him entirely detestable, a self-satisfied, slanderous, lying libertine, flourishing in corruption

The relations between Barras and Josephine were perfectly open, though hardly such a notorious scandal as her enemies make out Still it was unfashionable to conceal intrigues of the kind, especially in private life Josephine still had a house at Croissy in the summer of 1795, the rent of which Barras claims that he paid for her Her entertainment of her lover there is recorded by the Chancellor Pasquier in his "*Histoire de mon Temps*" Pasquier, too, had a summer residence at Croissy

"We had as a neighbour Mme de Beauharnais," he writes "Her house was next ours She came there but seldom, once a week, to receive Barras, with the numerous company which he brought in his train From morning onward we used to see baskets of provisions arriving Then mounted police began to pass along the road from Nanterre to Croissy, for the young Director<sup>1</sup> most often came on horseback Mme Beauharnais' house, as is usually

<sup>1</sup> Pasquier is premature in his bestowal of this title

the custom among Creoles, had a certain ostentatious luxury, while in the midst of superfluities the greatest necessities would be wanting. Fowl, game, rare fruits were piled up in the kitchen. It was the period of the utmost scarcity, and at the same time dishes, glasses, and plates were lacking, which they would come to borrow from our humble household."

Barras himself took a country house at Chaillot. That Josephine presided here is proved by the existence of a note of invitation to dinner there in her name, mentioning that citizens Barras and Tallien would be present. This note is dated the 24 *pluviôse an IV* (February 13, 1796)—less than a month before Josephine's marriage to Napoleon.

The most frequent, if less intimate, meetings, however, between Barras and Josephine were at the Luxembourg after Barras's rise to the post of Director. The Luxembourg, recently changed from a palace to a prison, became again the palatial home of the Directory, though when it was first reoccupied there was not a single piece of furniture in the building, and the Directors were obliged to borrow a table from the hall-porter, on which to write their

message to the Councils. A kind of Court began rapidly to gather at the Luxembourg, Barras being, if not the king, at least the leader of fashion, followed at a considerable distance by Carnot, who alone of the other Directors had any social pretensions. Paris had altered greatly after the end of the Terror, and the Luxembourg now set the example for Paris. In the words of Arnault, "gallantry had come back, and Woman, who had been dispossessed of her empire under the Convention, began to resume her sway once more." Woman was especially prominent at the *salons* of Barras, where were to be seen among others Mme Tallien, Mme Récamier, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, and Josephine. The assemblies also gathered together a most motley crowd of late Terrorists, ex-aristocrats, *incroyables*, Jacobins, and even returning *émigrés*, all mixed up together like the guests at a fancy dress ball. Every one seemed anxious to forget everything except pleasure, of which there was certainly much owing to Paris. No time was lost in making up the arrears, and the round of unrestrained gaieties was unbroken by any consideration of the general scarcity.



MADAME TALLIEN

1793-1807. *Journal de la Révolution* (1793-1807)



In such an environment Josephine, now at thirty-two developed into a fascinating woman of the world, very different from the awkward colonial girl of seventeen or eighteen who had wearied Alexandre de Beauharnais, found no difficulty in living a life of luxurious debt, helped by the friendship of the chief of the Directors Aubenas, it is scarcely surprising to see, rejects all stories of her share in the assemblies and fêtes which charmed and scandalised Paris after the Terror, and says that she is made to take part in them on the strength of apocryphal letters, unsupported by any serious and impartial contemporary witness. Previously to her meeting with Bonaparte he makes her pass a whole year in mourning for her husband. Here Aubenas is, unfortunately, unconvincing. So far from spending her time in mourning for the late Vicomte, Josephine sought consolation only too soon. This must be allowed, even if we credit her with no other lover than Barras, which is contrary to all the gossip of the day. But nothing can explain Barras away, and her misfortune in knowing him, though it doubtless appeared to her at the time a piece of excellent fortune, must

leave a permanent stain on her record In his later venom (caused, it would seem, by the fact that she became Napoleon's wife, for no personal grievance against her can be found), Barras bespatters her without compunction We have already seen some of his remarks about Josephine In the same chapter of his *Memoirs* he compares in his gallant fashion the women with whom he engaged in intrigues and says

"I must point out a distinction which the acquaintances of Mme Tallien and Mme Beauharnais agreed in making between them namely that the *liaisons* of Mme Tallien were for her genuine pleasure As for Mme Beauharnais, it was the general belief that her relations even with the men whom she most appreciated were not as generous as those of Mme Tallien Even though the physical motive appeared to be with Mme Beauharnais the origin of her relations her libertinism sprang merely from the mind while her heart played no part in the pleasure of her body in a word, never loving save from motives of interest the licentious Creole never lost sight of business although those possessing her might fancy she

was conquered by them and was giving herself freely ”

This would be a terrible indictment, were it not Barras who makes it. Unhappily, whatever poor value one may set on the judgment which Barras puts into the mouths of “ the acquaintances of Mme Tallien and Mme Beauharnais,” one can have but one opinion about a point which does not suggest itself to Barras, the utter degradation for Josephine in her association with such a man.

## CHAPTER VII

### NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

FROM the autumn of 1795 the history of Josephine becomes more precise, and gossip so difficult to estimate at its proper worth, gives place more and more to real evidence. The cause of this change is that now at length her path crosses that of Napoleon Bonaparte, in the thirty-third year of her age and the twenty-sixth of his. It was time indeed that the widow Beauharnais should meet some one able to take her fate into his hands and remove her from the life of disreputable luxury to which her levity of character and the pressure of her debts threatened to bind her fast.

At the time when Josephine first saw the man who was to make her an Empress she had just moved into her new house at 6 rue Chantereine her ability to pay the rent of which was attributed to the fact that she was mistress or one



NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

From the pen drawing by Baron Gros in the Louvre



of the mistresses, of the leading man in France. She was well known in the foremost society of the day, where she owed her introduction to Barras and the Talliens. She included among her friends Mme. Récamier ; the former Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who had temporarily resumed her maiden name of de Navailles , Mmes. de Kreny and de Château-Renard, as well as others of less respectable reputation ,<sup>1</sup> and among men, beside the revolutionary leaders, a number of the old nobility, such as Caulaincourt, Montesquieu, Nivernais, and Ségur, formerly French Ambassador to Catherine the Great. She still maintained relations with the older members of her own family, and she kept a brave front toward the world of Paris, not apt to be over-censorious as to a woman's means of livelihood in those days.

The date and circumstances of the first meeting of Josephine and Napoleon are given in a story which has become famous—how at the time of the general disarmament of Paris, consequent on the hostile attitude of forty-three out of the forty-eight sections of the city toward the

<sup>1</sup> "Some of the *demi-monde*," says M. Masson, "whom the astonished little Corsican took for the real *monde*."

Convention's decrees, the Government's agents called at Josephine's house and attempted to remove the late Vicomte's sword how they were resisted by Eugene and agreed to let him appeal to the general in command how Eugène hastened into Bonaparte's presence how Bonaparte was touched at the boy's request and allowed him to keep the sword and how Josephine called to thank the General next day and immediately conquered his heart Barras who dismisses the story of the sword as an *historiette touchante* invented by Napoleon, says that no arms were taken from the young Beauharnais or from his mother's house, since she belonged to "our party" and he claims to have remarked to Eugène who accompanied his mother to the Luxembourg at the time when the disarmament of the 2 *vendémiaire* was proceeding "Your house is not one of those where there is any idea of taking such a step Eugène Besides, your father's sword is certainly that of a good Republican" Barras adds the characteristic comment "The young man might have been touched at this remembrance I was most genuinely Mme Beauharnais probably least of all, since Alexandre's widow had not by any

means shown herself inconsolable for the loss of so excellent a citizen ” <sup>1</sup>

Napoleon's own version of what occurred may be seen in the “*Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*” :

“It was during his command at Paris that Napoleon made the acquaintance of Mme. de Beauharnais. The general disarmament of the sections had been carried out. There appeared at headquarters a young man from ten to twelve years of age, who came to beg the commander-in-chief to return to him the sword of his father, formerly general in the Republican service. This young man was Eugène de Beauharnais,

<sup>1</sup> In an autograph note added to M. Duruy's edition of the *Memoirs of Barras*, but not found in the earlier edition of Barras's literary executor, Saint-Albin, the following account is to be found, which bears some resemblance to the ordinary version of the sword story. “One of my aides-de-camp told me that there was a lady asking for Bonaparte. This lady held by the hand a young man of fourteen to fifteen years of age. I soon recognised Mme. de Beauharnais with her son Eugène. Arms had been taken from her house by error on the day of the troubles, and she had been clever enough to say, through her son, that they belonged to her husband, the late General Beauharnais. She came to me next day as if to refer to me the petition which she had already made—and which had already been granted—for the restoration of the arms. Her real object was to make her way into my society, where she knew that Mme. Tallien had taken first place since the 9 *thermidor*.” Barras is not a consistent liar, for this account does not at all tally with the statements in his *Memoirs* as edited by Saint-Albin.

afterwards Viceroy of Italy Napoleon, touched by the nature of this request and by his youthful grace granted his request Eugène began to weep at the sight of his father's sword The General was affected and showed him so much kindness that Mme de Beauharnais felt obliged to call next day to express her gratitude Napoleon hastened to return her visit Every one knows the extreme grace of the Empress Josephine and her sweet and attractive manners The acquaintance soon became intimate and they married without delay " <sup>1</sup>

In spite of the sneers of Barras, there does not seem sufficient reason for rejecting the date of the 22 *vendémiaire* (October 14 1795) as that of Josephine's introduction to Napoleon She had been in possession of the rue Chantereine house twelve days and he had made his mark in Paris nine days earlier The rising General at once became one of the most frequent visitors

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires* ii. 216 The account which Napoleon gave to Barry O'Meara is practically identical but concludes

I felt so much affected by his conduct that I noticed and praised him much A few days afterwards his mother came to return me a visit of thanks I was much struck with her appearance and still more with her *esprit* This first impression was daily strengthened and marriage was not long in following

There are no records of the first hours of friendship, but M Masson in his "Napoleon et les Femmes," chapter III, attempts an amusing reconstruction of the scene which met the young General's eyes when he entered the rather meagrely furnished abode of the lady who was so soon to have him at her feet. Evidences of former elegance there certainly were, but many things were woefully lacking. Napoleon, however, did not come to see the house but its mistress, and with her he found nothing amiss. He does not exaggerate when he says that "the acquaintance soon became intimate." No further proof is required than the note written by Josephine and dated the 6 *brumaire* (October 28), fourteen days after the first meeting. In spite of its brevity, this note can leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to Josephine's feelings for Napoleon, or at least as to the opinion which she wished him to have about those feelings. She wrote

"You come no longer to see a friend who loves you. You have altogether deserted her. You do wrong, for she is tenderly attached to you. Come to-morrow, *septidi*, to lunch with me. I want to see you and talk with you about

your affairs    Good night my friend I embrace  
you

“ VEUVE BEAUHARNAIS ”

The “ widow Beauharnais ” seems to have had no reason to reproach her friend again for staying away from her    Unfortunately a letter from him to her is undated so that we cannot judge precisely the pace at which their intimacy proceeded    The letter seems to belong to the commencement of the actual *liaison*

‘ I awoke full of you,’ Napoleon wrote  
“ Your portrait and the intoxicating evening yesterday left no rest for my senses    Sweet and incomparable Josephine what strange effect do you produce on my heart? Are you angry do I see you sad are you troubled    my spirit is crushed with grief and there is no rest for your friend    But is there any more for me when I abandon myself to the profound emotion which overwhelms me and drink in from your lips and your heart a fire which devours me? It was this night that I discovered how different are your portrait and you    You are going at mid day    I shall see you in three hours’ time. In the meantime *mon dolce amor* a million



JOSEPH BONAPARTE

From an engraving after a painting by Vicart



kisses ; but do not give any to me, for yours devour my blood ”

It looks as if the reference in the words “ you are going at mid-day ” may be to Josephine’s visit to Hamburg mentioned in Chapter VI , in which case Napoleon’s letter was written at some time between Josephine’s note of the 6 *brumaire* and her departure to Hamburg <sup>1</sup>

From the above letters it is clear that love was very early mentioned between Napoleon and Josephine <sup>2</sup> When they first spoke of marriage is less certain Bourrienne cannot be considered a very trustworthy witness His account of the first occasion on which he heard of Josephine is that some time after *vendémiaire* (when he joined Napoleon in Paris) he and Napoleon were dining at a restaurant, when the General pointed out to him a young lady sitting nearly opposite them What did he

<sup>1</sup> See p 124 and footnote (1) But it is impossible to reconcile Aubenas’s date for Josephine’s letter to her mother from Hamburg—October 30—and that of her note to Napoleon, since we must allow for the time taken to reach Hamburg from Paris at this epoch

<sup>2</sup> The first mention of the name of Josephine, by the way, is in the undated letter from Napoleon He seems to have been the first to give it to her The Bonapartes were fond of altering names at their caprice

think of her ? asked Napoleon Bourrienne's answer seemed to please him, and he proceeded to talk much about her and her family and her amiable qualities He would probably marry her, he said, being convinced that the union would make him happy

Another letter written by Napoleon, also unhappily undated, except by the hour '9 o'clock in the morning," brings the idea of marriage nearer, though the word is not mentioned

" I left you carrying with me a painful feeling I went to bed in great anger It seemed to me that the esteem due to my character ought to remove from your mind the last thought which influenced you yesterday night If it held sway over your heart, you would be most unjust, madame, and I most unhappy So you thought that I did not love you for yourself!!! For what, then ? Ah, madame, how greatly I must have changed ! Could so base a feeling be born in so pure a heart ? I am still astonished at it, but less so than at the feeling which, when I awoke, cast at me your feet, without any malice against you or any power of will But you, *mon doux amour*, have you slept

well ? Have you thought even twice of me ? I give you three kisses · one on your heart, one on your mouth, and one on your eyes ”

The exclamation “ So you thought that I did not love you for yourself ” leaves one curious about the scene of the night before Napoleon's letter. It is hardly possible that Josephine can have reproached Napoleon seriously with loving her for her money, for the supposed twenty-five thousand livres which she claimed as her income, but which were assuredly not substantial enough to meet her already vast liabilities. Her perpetual financial embarrassment could scarcely be so well concealed from him that he could be accused of having imagined her desirable on account of her wealth. It is conceivable that she may have charged him with wishing to marry her through ambition, since this was a motive to which he gave some colour himself. At the end of the passage just referred to in Bourrienne's *Memoirs*, the writer says . “ I gathered from his conversation that his union with the young widow would probably aid him in attaining the objects of his ambition. His ever-growing intimacy with her whom he loved brought him in contact with the most

influential people of the day and made it easier for him to get his pretensions recognised." Napoleon may have talked thus to Bourrienne in order to disguise the warmth of his passion for Josephine, but others also at the time of his marriage imputed to him a mingling of ambition with his love.

In connection with the possibility of Josephine's monetary difficulties being kept from Napoleon, another question suggests itself. How could he be ignorant of her relations with Barras? M. Masson seems to think that he was quite unaware of them and adduces the story told by Barras himself. One day Josephine was being escorted home from the Luxembourg by an *aide-de-camp* of the Director when she found Napoleon waiting for her. She made a tearful attempt at an explanation, telling him that Barras had previously made love to her, had taken up Mme Tallien with the idea of rousing her jealousy, had offered to abandon Mme Tallien for her, and finally had made an attempt on her that very day, whereon she had fainted. Napoleon was for going at once to demand satisfaction from the Director, but Josephine began to excuse him, saying, "His

manners are rather rough, but he is very kind and useful, a friend and nothing more."

This tale resembles many in the *Memoirs of Barras*. the malice is obvious, but not the truth, and it proves nothing. Napoleon's infatuation for Josephine, however, was so great—as his letters before and after his marriage show—that it is permissible to credit his blindness to the scandal which it was impossible to conceal from ordinary eyes

Whatever the trouble which inspired the letter of "9 o'clock in the morning," it caused no break in the relations between Josephine and her lover. He was swept along in her train through the society which frequented the Luxembourg and the houses of Mme. Tallien and other stars of the period—a society of reviving courtesy in which the brusque-mannered Corsican must have felt himself strangely out of place. Dearer than his association with her in the circles of the Directory were his visits to the rue Chantereine, when her "extreme grace and sweet and attractive manners" might be displayed for him alone. The end was not long in coming, and to the outside world it may well have seemed sudden. On February 13,

1796 Josephine was inviting guests to a dinner over which she presided in Barras's house in the rue Basse-Saint-Pierre, Chaillot. On February 24 she agreed to marry Napoleon Bonaparte. On the night of March 9 he knocked up the mayor, who had already gone to bed in his quarters in the second arrondissement of Paris, and at ten o'clock the marriage was performed. The ceremony was purely civil, and no members of either family were present. Josephine's witnesses were her lawyer Calmelet and Tallien, Napoleon's, Barras and the youthful Captain Lemarrus, the aide-de-camp who had first brought Eugène Beauharnais to his general. As has already been seen, in order to bring their ages closer together, the bride in signing the register took four years from her thirty-two while the groom added a year and a half to his twenty-five.

There is very little to give a clue to Josephine's true feelings toward the man she was marrying. There is one letter said to have been written by her to some woman friend, Aubenas rejects it on account of its style but admits that its sentiments are such as might be expected. It contains the following passage

“ You have seen General Bonaparte at my house It is he who desires to be a father to the orphan children of Alexandre de Beauharnais and a husband to his widow. ‘ Do you love him ? ’ will be your question Well—no ! ‘ You have an antipathy to him, then ? ’ No · but I am in a state of lukewarmness which displeases me and is considered by the devotee the worst state of all in matters of religion.”

Then there is a record kept by Ségur of a conversation which he had with her in 1804, when he told her of the difficulty with which he first persuaded himself, an old Royalist, to enter the First Consular household Josephine confided in return “ her inner struggles and long repugnances at the end of 1795, in spite of her inclination for Bonaparte, before she could make up her mind to marry one whom she herself called ‘ General Vendémiaire.’ ”

In view of Josephine's genuinely Royalist sympathies (however much disguised in her *sans-culotterie* of 1794), there is nothing blame-worthy in the scruples which she confessed to Ségur But the letter quoted above, if genuine, shows her in a much less favourable light It can scarcely surprise us, seeing how she acted

after his departure for Italy But it certainly shows that she did not "love for himself" the man against whom she had unjustly brought a complaint of similar interestedness Although the strength of his passion no doubt influenced her, she cannot escape the suspicion of accepting him because he was twenty-five and had already a great future prophesied, while she was thirty-two, was beginning to fade, had large debts and two children, and her prospects of a good marriage were scanty if she refused the love-blinded Corsican

For the most part her family and friends approved of the match or offered no opposition to it Perhaps some of the ex aristocrats looked doubtfully on "General Vendémiaire" But others knew of the General's expectations Her aunt Mme Renaudin and the old Marquis de Beauharnais, who were themselves getting married after thirty eight years acquaintance, favoured the second marriage of her whom they had seen to suffer so much in her first The Beauharnais children, perhaps, were less inclined than any to be friendly, especially Hortense She first met her mother's lover at the dinner at the Luxembourg in January 1796,

in commemoration of the King's death. Although not yet fourteen, she was among the guests on the strength of her mother's acquaintance with Barras and his fellow Directors. Among the others present were the Talliens and Bonaparte. Hortense sat between her mother and the General, who talked vivaciously all the time to Josephine, leaning forward across the child and causing her to draw back. "He spoke with ardour and seemed to take sole notice of my mother," says Hortense, recalling the scene. Her first impressions of her step-father were certainly not agreeable, and Mme Campan records that, when the news reached her later that her mother was to become Mme Bonaparte, she wept. Both she and Eugène were proud of their father's name and had not been allowed by Josephine to realise how worthless a man he had been. They therefore resented the second marriage, much as Napoleon strove to show that he loved the children of his Josephine. Eugène appears to have conquered his early feelings towards Napoleon first, while in Hortense a degree of fear persisted longer.

One person in Josephine's circle exhibited a suspicion of her future husband which was

pardonable, perhaps even praiseworthy on professional grounds, namely, her notary Raguideau Méneval's version of the story, doubtless taken from the mouths of Josephine and Napoleon, seems preferable to others. A few days before the wedding Josephine sent for Raguideau, who arrived in the morning, while she was still in bed. She had been holding a *levee*, however, and there were some people in the room, all of whom retired except one young man, who went and stood in a window recess, where the notary did not see him. Josephine explained her wishes about the marriage contract and then asked him what people were saying. Raguideau told her that the idea of her marriage with so young a man, with a career to make, amid the dangers of war, was not altogether welcomed. He stated that this was his opinion too, and that, while the General was no doubt estimable, he had "nothing but his cloak and his sword." Josephine thanked him and then called with a laugh to the young man in the window, who was of course Napoleon. "General," she asked, "have you heard what M. Raguideau has just been saying?" "Yes, he has spoken like an honourable man. I hope

that he will continue to look after our affairs, for he has inclined me to put my trust in him." This speech rather disconcerted Raguideau, who had been ignorant of his audience. But he did not suffer for his advice, being rewarded later by the Emperor with a subordinate post in the Government

Méneval, after telling the story, scouts the addition to it which it has pleased others to make, how that on the day of his coronation Napoleon summoned Raguideau to him and, showing him his mantle and the sword whose hilt was adorned with the celebrated Regent diamond, said "Raguideau, here is my cloak and here my sword!"<sup>1</sup>

If there was no serious objection to the Bonaparte-Beauharnais wedding on the side of the bride's friends, it was very different on the side of the bridegroom's. But Napoleon forestalled all opposition by keeping his family entirely in the dark. He did not ask his mother's consent nor write to his elder brother Joseph. He

<sup>1</sup> Méneval, "Memoires," i 204. If Raguideau actually mentioned the cape and sword, he was singularly near the truth, for in the marriage-contract the husband "declares that he owns neither lands nor goods beyond his personal wardrobe and his military accoutrements."

hurried Lucien off to join the Army of the North and even found an excuse for sending Louis out of Paris. He felt that it would be useless to try to win over the Bonaparte clan before his marriage but, like all lovers, he trusted in being able to do so afterwards aided by the beauty and grace of the lady of his choice. He had little time at his disposal for their conversion after March 9 but with that marvellous power which he always showed of conducting his private affairs in the midst of the most arduous public duties, he took the first steps before he assumed command of the Army of Italy.

This command in Italy which took the newly married General from Paris two days after his wedding was according to some of his enemies, the bait which made Josephine so attractive to him. She could influence Barras and was not Barras a large part of the Government? Perhaps Josephine herself believed the story though it made Napoleon's tribute to her personal fascinations less great at any rate when it was revived after Napoleon's return from Italy she did not take the trouble to deny it. In the alleged letter of Josephine to a woman

friend, to which reference was made above, the words occur

“Barras says that if I marry the General he will get him the chief command of the Army of Italy. Yesterday Bonaparte, speaking to me of this favour, which already causes murmurs among his brother officers, although it is not yet granted, said ‘Do they think that I have need of protection in order to make my way? They will all be only too glad for me to give them my protection. My sword is at my side, and with it I shall go far’ ”

The doubt as to the authenticity of this letter makes it impossible to draw any conclusion from it. Barras himself was anxious to have the story believed, since it brought him credit for perspicacity with regard to Napoleon’s genius, while at the same time it redounded little to the credit of either Napoleon or Josephine. Barras’s claim, however, is entirely denied by his colleague Carnot,<sup>1</sup> and between Carnot and

<sup>1</sup> Carnot says, in his defence of himself against the deputy Bailleul “It is not true that it was Barras who proposed Bonaparte for the command of the Army of Italy, it was I . and it was only among his most intimate friends that Barras boasted of being the author of the suggestion to the Directory. Had Bonaparte failed, I should have been the

Barras there is no doubt who is the more trustworthy

Of course Barras was in a position to give early information to Josephine of the promotion which he pretended to have secured for her lover. On February 21 1796, he congratulated her at the Luxembourg on General Bonaparte's nomination which was to be made next day. Two days later she and Napoleon were engaged, and in another thirteen they were married with Barras prominent among the witnesses.

The honeymoon if it may be called so lasted two days during part of which the legend goes, Napoleon was obliged to shut himself up in a room with his maps calling out through the locked door *that love must be adjourned until after victory*. On March 11 he wrote a letter to Letourneur President of the Directory

"I have requested citizen Barras to inform

one to be blamed since I had proposed a young man without experience an intriguer and had evidently betrayed my country. The others had nothing to do with war it was on me that all the responsibility must fall. Bonaparte was victorious so it was Barras who got him nominated; it was to him that thanks were due he was his protector his defender against my attacks. I was jealous of Bonaparte I thwarted him in all his plans persecuted him blackened his character refused him all help and evidently wished to ruin him.

the Executive Directory of my marriage with the citizeness Tascher Beauharnais. The trust in me which the Directory has shown in all matters makes it my duty to inform it of all my actions. This is a new bond to unite me to my country. It is one pledge the more of my firm resolve to look for no safety except in the Republic."

Having written thus, Napoleon bade good-bye to his wife and started for the south. According to Barras, he had the simplicity to commend her to his care. If this be true, no further proof can be wanted of Napoleon's ignorance, astonishing though it may seem, of the relation in which Josephine had stood to the Director.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FROM THE RUE CHANTEREINE TO ITALY

FROM the point of Napoleon's departure for Italy Josephine began to receive a series of the most remarkable love letters ever penned. Mme de Rémusat says in her *Memoirs* that these letters 'furnished a piquant contrast to the elegant and studied grace of those from M de Beauharnais.' Any one who has read the examples of Alexandre de Beauharnais's epistolary style quoted in the earlier chapters of this book will agree with Mme de Rémusat about the piquancy of the contrast but will probably have a different opinion as to the appropriate description of the Vicomte's letters to his wife.

Napoleon lost no time in beginning his correspondence. After leaving Paris he stopped first at Châtillon on the Seine the home of the father of Marmont one of his friends at Brienne. From here he sent Josephine a power of attorney

to handle some moneys coming in to him. Continuing his journey, he wrote from Chanceaux on March 14, telling her what he had done at Châtillon. He went on

“Every moment separates me further from you, my adorable one, and every moment I find in myself less strength to bear the separation. You are the constant object of my thoughts ; my imagination exhausts itself in guessing what you are doing. If I see you sad, my heart is torn and my grief increases. If you are gay and playful with your friends, I reproach you for forgetting so soon the painful separation of three days ago. So you are frivolous, and therefore you are stirred by no deep feeling ! As you see, I am not easy to content. Ah, do not be gay, be a little melancholy, and above all may your soul be as free from trouble as your body from sickness ! You know what the good Ossian says about this

“Write to me, my loving friend, and write a really long letter, and receive the thousand and one kisses of a most tender and true love ”

This letter, whose passion makes it at times incoherent, the young bridgroom addressed by a most curious error to “The Citizeness Beau-

harnais, 6 rue Chantereine ! ” Could anything more clearly betray his agitation of mind ? But his actions were calm and sensible enough, and he found time amid all the preparations for taking up his command to approach the leading members of his family on behalf of his wife. He made a stay of two days at Marseilles for the purpose of seeing his mother who was still living there with her daughters and the fruit of this visit was a letter from Mme Letizia Bonaparte to her daughter-in-law. It was March 23 when Napoleon left Marseilles and his mother did not write her letter until nine days later when she had already it seems received a communication from Josephine. As she was a bad French scholar and could scarcely write more than her own name it is probable that she had the document drafted for her by Joseph at Genoa. The letter so formal in its tone was hardly calculated to inspire Josephine with a great idea of the writer’s anxiety to welcome her into her family. It ran as follows

“ I have received your letter madame which could but increase the estimate which I had formed of you. My son had informed me of

his happy marriage, and from that moment you had not only my esteem but my approval. To my happiness there is only lacking the satisfaction of seeing you. Be sure that I feel for you all a mother's tenderness and that I cherish you equally with my own children. My son gave me to hope, and your letter confirms this, that you would pass through Marseilles on your way to join him. I rejoice, madame, at the pleasure which your stay here will give me. My daughters join me in anticipating the happy moment of your journey. Meanwhile, be persuaded that my children, following my example, promise you the same friendship and tenderness as they have for their brother. Believe, madame, in the attachment and affection of

“LETIZIA BUONAPARTE MERE”

The letter from Josephine to which this was an answer is, like the great bulk of her letters, missing.

Next to Mme Letizia, Joseph Bonaparte was the most important among Josephine's new relatives. His first letter followed a few days after his mother's. In the meantime Napoleon, who had reached Nice on March 27, had re-

quested his brother then engaged in commerce at Genoa to meet him at Albenga whence he wrote to Josephine that Joseph was "burning with anxiety to meet her" Joseph's own letter of April 7 was however, not very ardent in its language

"Madame" he wrote "I heard with the keenest interest of your marriage with my brother The friendship which binds me to him does not allow me to deny the happiness which you will bring him I am sure of it as he is from the idea which I have formed of you Pray believe in the fraternal sentiments of your brother-in-law "

The heads of the Bonaparte clan therefore had made the required overtures to the stranger whom its coming leader had introduced into it It remained to be seen how they would fulfil their promises of affection to her when they had met her face to face At the present moment the only members of the family who were likely to know anything of the late widow Beauharnais were the three younger sons, Lucien and Louis who had been in Paris at the time of Napoleon's *liaison* and Jerome who after the 13 *vendémiaire* had been sent to

the school where Josephine had placed Eugène. It is hardly likely that much information from them had reached Letizia and Joseph Bonaparte.

Josephine was therefore left in Paris, after two days only of her second essay in married life, free to spend her time according to her pleasure. From her husband she was in receipt of sufficient money to maintain her position in the house in the rue Chantereine, if not to cope with the debts of which Napoleon probably knew little or nothing as yet—the debts which her own alleged income of twenty-five thousand livres, coupled with her borrowings from Emmery and Marie Lanoy, had been quite inadequate to meet. Her two children were both at school at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, near Paris. Eugène was at the Collège Irlandais, which had been started by Patrick MacDermot, former tutor to Mme Campan's son; Hortense at Mme Campan's own select academy, where the principal educated so many future princesses and ladies of title in the manners and accomplishments of the old *régime*.

For the moment the new Mme. Bonaparte had no encumbrances, and she was not slow

to show her appreciation of her life in these circumstances and her reluctance to quit it. She moved in the same circles as before her second marriage with the added advantage of an assured rank as wife of the commander in Italy. None of her old friends were cast aside. She and Mme Tallien were inseparable. So they are described by Arnault who returned to Paris from Marseilles in April 1796, and was introduced by the two ladies to the *salon* of Barras. In his amusing "Souvenirs d'un Sexagénaire" he has much to say about this period. He had been absent from the capital for five months and was much astonished by the changes which he saw. The gaiety of Paris reminded him of the rejoicings after a funeral in some countries. 'Every day there was a fete. The public gardens were never empty. Concert-halls and ball rooms like the play houses were too small for the crowds thirsting for the pleasures of which they had been so long deprived. A curious feature of the times was the "Victim Party" a class of entertainment given by some of the ex nobles to celebrate the losses in their families during the Terror at which the guests appeared with

their hair cut short, *coiffés à la victime*, as if before the guillotine. Still more remarkable were other extravagances of dress—and undress—described not only by Arnault, but by all the memoirists of the time. Among the most prominent figures was Mme Tallien, who did not scruple to appear in public in the costume of Diana, with a short tunic, reaching to her knees and only partly covering her breasts, and buskins on her feet. We do not hear of Josephine in such attire, but she affected the Greek dress which divided popularity with other eccentricities of the Directory period, and helped to lend such an air of carnival to Paris life.

Arnault gives a description of Josephine as she appeared to him now, which is the more interesting for being almost the only portrait of her at the epoch of her second marriage<sup>1</sup>. She was not the most beautiful woman who was to be seen at the Luxembourg, he says, but she was certainly the most amiable.

<sup>1</sup> There is another, not so flattering, from the pen of the Duchesse d'Abrantès, who was far from loving Josephine. "She was still charming at this epoch [May 1796] . . . Her teeth were frightfully bad, but when her mouth was shut she had the appearance, especially at a few paces' distance, of a young and pretty woman" ("Mémoires," II 51)

“ Her even temper the gentleness of her disposition the kindness which animated her looks and was expressed not merely in her language but in the very tone of her voice her natural Creole indolence which showed itself in her attitude as well as in her movements and which she did not entirely lose when exerting herself to render a service—all this gave her a charm which counterbalanced the vivid beauty of her two rivals [Mme Tallien and Mme Récamier] Although she had less brilliance and freshness than the other two still thanks to her regular features her elegant suppleness of figure, and the sweet expression of her countenance she was beautiful also ”

This is an early tribute to the peculiar fascination which Josephine throughout the second part of her life exercised over men willing to admit that there were many whose beauty exceeded hers and that she was not to speak strictly a “ beauty ” at all It is unfortunate that we have nowhere any record of Josephine's own opinion of her charms That she did not underrate them is clear from certain small indications which we find later , and how could she, when she looked upon the number of her

admirers from her early prime down to the day of her death ?

For the present, her really great conquest was one about which she appeared to give herself very little concern. Not even her most ardent eulogists can make her out to have been in any sense a good wife to Napoleon in 1796. She may not have been actually unfaithful to him as yet, although her continued intimacy with Barras is very suspicious<sup>1</sup>. But her treatment of his passionate letters and her extreme unwillingness to join him in Italy show an indifference to him which would be considered cynical in any other woman. He continued to pour out his love in the most unmeasured language. Here are two extracts<sup>a</sup> from letters written to her during his early days in Italy :

“ You have done more than rob me of my soul. You are the one thought of my life. If I am wearied with the turmoil of affairs, if I fear the outcome, if men disgust me, if I am ready to curse life, I put my hand upon my heart and feel your portrait there, I gaze upon it, love fills me with absolute happiness,

<sup>1</sup> Especially in view of the letter quoted on p. 214.

and all smiles on me except the length of time that I see myself separated from my dear one '

"To live for Josephine! That is the story of my life I work in order to get near you I kill myself in order to reach you Fool that I am! I do not see that I am taking myself farther from you '

Napoleon no doubt made a grave error in overwhelming with such protestations the woman whom he had chosen and whose character he knew so little But this error hardly excuses Josephine for her reception of the protestations Arnault relates <sup>1</sup> that when she was brought, by the hand of Murat a command from Napoleon to join him in Italy she showed it to him together with the other letters which he had sent to her since his departure from Paris all betraying a most violent passion

"Josephine was amused at this feeling, which was not devoid of jealousy I can still hear her reading a passage in which while seeming to reject the suspicions which obviously tortured him her husband wrote If it is true however beware the dagger of Othello!'

<sup>1</sup> Souvenirs II 91

I can hear her say, with her Creole accent, '*Il est drôle, Bonaparte !*' "

Josephine never had any reticence about her husband. Whether he amused or vexed her, she must always seek a confidant Arnault continues

"The love which she inspired in so extraordinary a man clearly flattered her, although she took matters less seriously than he did. She was proud to see that he loved her almost as much as he loved glory. She enjoyed this glory, daily increasing, but it was in Paris that she liked to enjoy it, in the midst of the applause which resounded about her at each fresh piece of news from the Army of Italy."

An even more curious reminiscence of Josephine's attitude toward her husband at this period is furnished by Bailleul, the deputy<sup>1</sup>. Dining with her one night, he discussed Bonaparte's successes and asked her what she thought of him. "I think Bonaparte a very brave man," she answered. No more. It would be possible to make too much of this careless reply, but at least it cannot be called very sentimental or romantic, as Bailleul says.

<sup>1</sup> "Étude sur les causes de l'élévation de Napoléon," 1. 138.

But the victorious general was unaware of the thoughts of his wife in Paris and his one anxiety was to make her join him in Italy. His messengers to Paris at the end of April were not only heralds of victory to the Directory but also bearers of requests to his wife. First came Murat with the text of the treaty concluded with Sardinia then Junot carrying twenty-two standards captured from the Austrians and with him Joseph Bonaparte bearing a confidential despatch to the Directors. All of them had messages to the conqueror's wife. Joseph came with a letter of recommendation from his brother. "I have for him the most tender friendship" wrote Napoleon. "he will, I hope get the same from you for he deserves it." Joseph was charged to use his powers of persuasion with the lady whom he was meeting for the first time. It is probable that he and Josephine were at once unfavourably impressed with one another for it was not long before we see them in opposition, which afterwards developed into lifelong hostility.

By the hand of Junot, the summons to Josephine was, perhaps playfully, peremptory. "You must return with him, do you under-

stand ? ” wrote Napoleon It may be suspected that in her letters Josephine had betrayed her unwillingness to leave Paris. Still less ready was she to do so now, when the fame of the victory at Montenotte made her the recipient of so much reflected glory and personal admiration The fêtes in honour of France’s success might well seem to her to centre around her Was there any one more conspicuous than herself at the ceremony of the presentation of the standards to the Directory on May 9 ? She was perhaps but one of the three Queens of Beauty on this occasion, and not the most beautiful, but Mmes Tallien and Récamier were not the wives of the hero of the hour like Josephine When the standards had been received and the speeches were all over, the principal actors quitted the Luxembourg in the midst of a brilliant ovation Junot, the aide-de-camp, just made colonel, led out his general’s wife and Mme. Tallien from the Palace into the sunshine of a most glorious day of May The description of the scene may be left to Laurette Permon, who afterwards became Junot’s wife and Duchesse d’Abrantès :

“ It may be imagined that Junot was not a

little proud at giving his arms to these two charming women. He was then twenty five. He was a fine young man and had, in particular, a most remarkable military carriage. He wore that day a magnificent hussar uniform (that of the Berchény hussars), and all that the splendour of such a dress could add to his good looks had been employed to make the brave young messenger, still pale from the wounds whose blood had stained the flags taken from the enemy, worthy of the army which he represented. As he came out he offered his arm to Mme Bonaparte, who, as wife of his commander, had the right to first place, especially on this solemn day. He gave the other to Mme Tallien and so came down the steps of the Luxembourg with them. The crowd was immense. People crushed and jostled to get a better view.

“ ‘ See, it’s his wife ! It’s his aide de-camp ! How young he is and how pretty she is ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Long live General Bonaparte ! ’ cried the mob ”

“ Long live the citizeness Bonaparte ! She is good to the poor ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes,’ said a stout market woman, ‘ she’s really Our Lady of Victories ’ ”

“ ‘Yes,’ said another, ‘you’re right. But look at the officer’s other arm, that’s Our Lady of September.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

Such triumphs as this were dear to the heart of Josephine, and she was loth to forgo them and her easy life in Paris, whatever there might be awaiting her in the Italy to which her husband was calling her. It was difficult to find a pretext, however, for refusing to go—unless she were ill. Very conveniently for her purpose, she fell ill. It is impossible to resist the suspicion that her malady was one of the will, rather than of the body. But to Napoleon it was very real. Letters are extant from him to Joseph and his wife, written when he was at Tortona, in which he shows himself plunged in grief.

“I am in despair,” he writes to Joseph, “at learning that my wife is ill. My brain reels, and frightful forebodings agitate my mind. I beseech you to lavish all your cares upon her. . . . If she is well and can make the journey, I

<sup>1</sup> Duchesse d’Abrantès, “Mémoires,” II 51. The allusion was to the September massacres, and is described by the Duchess as *affreux et injuste*. Mme Tallien was also nicknamed *Notre-Dame-de-Thermidor*.

ardently long for her to come I want to see her, to press her to my heart I love her to madness, and I cannot stay far away from her If she ceased to love me, I should have nothing more to live for in the world My dear brother, see that my messenger only stops six hours in Paris and that he returns with new life for me "

And again, to Josephine

" My life is a perpetual nightmare A fatal foreboding prevents me from breathing I cannot see, I have lost more than life, more than happiness, more than peace, I am almost without hope I send you a messenger He will only stop four hours in Paris and will then bring me your answer Write me ten pages That alone will console me a little You are ill, you love me, I have grieved you, you are pregnant, and I cannot see you I have wronged you so much that I do not know how to atone for it I accuse you of lingering in Paris, and you are ill there Forgive me, my dear one, the love with which you have inspired me has robbed me of reason, and I shall never recover it "

But for our knowledge of the many facts of Napoleon's mind, it would be impossible to

believe that the man who was writing these pitiful, self-abasing letters was also conquering Italy, fighting and negotiating as if nothing existed for him except the career of his ambition.

The above letter to Josephine was written on June 15. But before she had time to receive it, Josephine had made up her mind to obey her husband's commands. Her illness was put aside and the suggestion that she was pregnant forgotten for the present. What finally determined her to go to Italy, we do not know. She did not start without letting it be seen that she was still very unwilling. "Her chagrin was extreme," Arnault writes, "when she saw that she had no way of escape. Thinking more of what she was about to leave than of what she was going to find, she would have given up the palace prepared for her reception at Milan, all the palaces in the world indeed, for her house in the rue Chantereine." So he describes her as supping for the last time at Luxembourg with a number of friends—presumably including Barras and the Talliens—and starting away with Fortuné, her dog, and her son Eugène. "Poor woman!" adds Arnault, "she burst into tears,

she sobbed as though she were going to torture. She was going to reign like a queen ! ”

The party which set out from Paris for Milan was no small one. Josephine had with her her waiting-woman, Louise Compont, three servants, and Fortuné. As her escort there went Joseph Bonaparte, Junot and Murat. The journey was not altogether as pleasant as it might have been, if we are to believe the gossip of the Duchesse d'Abrantès. Josephine, according to this, would have liked Colonel Junot to pay her attention. He, in his devotion to his general, would not lend himself to a flirtation with the general's wife, and to escape vexation made love to Louise, who was on intimate and friendly terms with her mistress. The consequence was a falling out between Josephine and her maid, ending in the latter's dismissal at Milan. It must be remembered that Mme d'Abrantès is always biassed when she writes about Josephine, and moreover she was Junot's wife. If Josephine was impressed by either of her husband's young messengers from Italy, it was by the dashing Murat, not by Junot. Murat's attentions to her in Paris had not escaped

notice, and rumour continued to couple his name with hers after their arrival in Italy until at last, as we shall see, it reached the ears of Napoleon himself

When the party reached Milan, the Commander-in-Chief was away for a few days on military duty, and the reception of Josephine was of necessity left to the Duc de Serbelloni, a great Milanese nobleman and President of the Directorate of the new Cisalpine Republic, in whose palace she was to be lodged. Napoleon's return was marked by great expressions of joy on his part at the pleasure of seeing her again. "Once at Milan," writes Marmont (afterwards Duc de Raguse), "General Bonaparte was very happy. For at that time he only lived for his wife; he had long been in the same condition. Never had a purer, truer, more exclusive love possessed the heart of a man, and that a man of so superior an order."

Quitting her again in a few days in order to try to preserve Mantua from the advance of Wurmser and the Austrian army, Napoleon continued to address to Josephine the most ardent letters, which Queen Hortense has preserved in her collection. That which most

merits quotation is the one dated Marmirolo, the 29 *messidor* (July 17), in which he says

"Since I left you I have been constantly melancholy My happiness is to be with you Unceasingly there go through my memory your kisses, your tears, your lovable jealousy, and the charms of the incomparable Josephine kindle unceasingly a bright and burning flame in my heart and my senses I thought I loved you a few days ago, but, since I have seen you, I feel that I love you a thousand times as much Since I have known you I adore you more every day This proves that La Bruyere's maxim that 'Love comes all of a sudden' is false Everything in nature has its course and a different rate of growth I beg you to let me see some of your faults Be less beautiful, less gracious, less tender, less kind above all, and above all never be jealous, never weep, your tears drive away my reason and scorch my blood Get back your health soon Come and join me, and at least, before we die, let us be able to say 'We were happy for so many days!'"

So the letters go on, with their messages about "kisses as burning as you are cold," "as burning

as my heart, as pure as you," anxious inquiries about her health, and sad complaints of two days without a letter from her. As he found himself unable to return to Milan, he sent for her to come to meet him toward the end of July at Brescia, "where the most tender of lovers awaits you." She came; but hardly had they been re-united when a fresh move on the part of Wurmser put them in a dangerous position. Marching on Mantua, he almost took Napoleon by surprise. According to what Josephine herself told Ségur, the Proveditore of Brescia treacherously attempted to aid the Austrians by inviting the French commander and his wife to an evening fête on the day on which they intended to depart. Josephine said that she "refused so obstinately that she persuaded Bonaparte to leave at once." "This happy inspiration," writes Ségur, "saved them. They were not four leagues from Brescia when the Austrians, in concert with the Proveditore, made a forcible entrance into the town. Had Bonaparte been surprised in the middle of the fête, he would have been either killed or made prisoner of war."

Whether it was really due to Josephine's

insistence or not, the escape from Brescia was decidedly lucky. With a small escort of twenty men the General reached the neighbourhood of Verona, whence he made an attempt to send his wife into safety by way of the shore of Lake Garda. But her carriage was fired upon by an Austrian boat, and, two of the horses being killed, she abandoned it and fled in a local cart to Castiglione, where Napoleon met her again. The presence of the Austrians at Brescia cut off direct communication with Milan, and Josephine's terror was extreme. She wept profusely, and Napoleon is reported to have vowed that Wurmser should pay him dearly for the tears which he had caused. At last an opportunity was found of reaching Milan by skirting Mantua, which a French force was besieging. Josephine passed under fire again, however, from the walls of Mantua, and it must have been with extreme relief that she reached Milan once more. Her husband's state of mind may be gathered from his letter of August 10, written as soon as he had reached Brescia again.

"I am here, my adored one," he says, "and my first thought is to write to you. Your

state of health and your image have never ceased to occupy my mind for one moment during the journey. I shall not be at peace until I have received letters from you I await some impatiently. It is impossible for you to imagine my anxiety. I left you melancholy, troubled, and half-ill. If the deepest and tenderest love could make you happy, you ought to be so. I am overwhelmed with affairs. Good-bye, my sweet Josephine. Love me, keep well, and think often, often of me.

“BONAPARTE.”

The letters which he hoped for did not come at once, for four days later we find him complaining of the anxiety caused by their absence. “You know how dear they are to me. I do not live when I am far from you, my life’s happiness is in the society of my sweet Josephine.”

It would be possible to quote at great length from these letters of Napoleon to his wife during the campaign of 1796, so instructive are they with regard to his feelings towards her. But as the letters have long been available in English to all interested in the story of

Napoleon and Josephine, the temptation must be resisted to do more than refer to those letters which are essential to the understanding of Josephine's history at this time. It is unfortunate that we have none of her replies to the impassioned appeals of Napoleon, for it would be interesting to see how far they deserved his criticism, in his letter dated Modena, October 17, that they were "as cold as fifty and like those of fifteen years of married life." One valuable letter of hers remains, having been discovered by Aubenas among the Tascher family archives, but it was addressed to Mme Renaudin, now become at length Marquise de Beauharnais. Josephine sent it to Paris by the hand of Serbelloni, in whose palace at Milan she was again lodged. She writes

"M. Serbelloni will inform you, dear aunt, how I have been received in Italy, feted wherever I went, by all the princes of Italy, including the Grand Duke of Tuscany, brother of the Emperor. Well, I prefer to be just a nobody in France! I do not care for the honours of this country. I am very wearied. It is true that my state of health contributes much to my

melancholy ; I am often ill. If happiness could bring me health, I ought to be well. I have the most amiable husband it is possible to meet I have no time to want anything My wishes are all his. He is all day in adoration before me, as if I were a divinity ; there could not be a better husband M Serbelloni will tell you how much I am loved He often writes to my children, whom he loves very much He is sending to Hortense, by M Serbelloni, a beautiful repeater-watch, enamelled and set with fine pearls ; and to Eugène a beautiful gold watch. Good-bye, my dear aunt, my dear mamma, be assured of my tenderest affection I will try to send to you a little money on the first opportunity, for the purpose for which you have asked it ”

Why should Josephine have been so “wearied ” at Milan, where she lived a life of extreme ease and was in no want of money—two points of great importance to her at all periods of her existence ? Part of the truth can be gathered from her letter to her aunt She was in indifferent health ; and the honours which were hers in Italy failed to please her because Italy was not Paris She had not

ceased to regret the splendour of Paris, where amid her own friends she could enjoy the glory of Napoleon's successes. Moreover, it is impossible to resist the idea that the husband "all day in adoration before her"—even when he was not within many miles of her—added to her weariness. In Paris, when she read his fervent protestations, she might complacently say "*Il est drole, Bonaparte !*" But in Italy it was not sufficient to pass over the matter so lightly, and to answer the many letters with an occasional reply. She did not write more frequently from Milan than from Paris, perhaps, but there was the inevitable meeting with her husband to be faced, as it had already been faced for a few days at Milan and at Brescia. It is only by ignoring the facts that her admiring biographers can present a picture of her at this period as a woman in love with her husband. On the other hand, her love for some one else was a subject of common talk in Milan and in the army at the time.

The man whom scandal assigned to her as a lover was a certain Hippolyte Charles, a friend of Leclerc, who had recently made him his assistant adjutant general. Among the

crowds of young officers who had been presented to the wife of the Commander-in-Chief on her arrival at Milan, Charles had especially caught her attention by his superficial attractions Arnault, who came across him earlier in 1796, declares that he "never met a better companion nor one of more equable temperament" The Duchesse d'Abrantès describes him at greater length. He was a friend of Junot as well as of Leclerc, so that she had opportunities for studying him In appearance Charles was small but well built, with a brown complexion, jet-black hair, passable eyes and teeth, and very small hands and feet In his elegant hussar costume, abundantly covered with gold lace, he was "charming" In society his wit was not of the kind which appealed to all He was much addicted to puns and similar forms of humour "A more comical man could not be found," says the Duchesse Such as he was, Charles appealed not only to the poet Arnault and the Duchesse d'Abrantès, but also to Josephine, who was not satisfied with admiring his social talents. She quickly made an intimate friend of him, and the fact did not escape public notice that in Napoleon's

absence he was a most constant visitor at the Serbelloni palace

Rumour did not at once acquaint Napoleon with the gossip of Milan, and if expressions of jealousy are to be found in his letters of September, October, and November 1796, they are but vague accusations of neglect and coldness. Definite suspicion was not aroused in his mind until after the victory of Arcoli had enabled him to return to Milan. On the 4 *frimaire* (November 24) he wrote a few hurried lines from Verona, saying that he hoped soon to be in the arms of her whom he "loved to madness," and that only Josephine's love was wanting to make her husband happy. Three days later he wrote to Genoa from Milan.

"I reached Milan, I hastened into your room, I left everything to see you and press you in my arms. You were not there. You are off to the towns with their fetes, you fly from me when I come, you no longer think of your dear Napoleon. Caprice caused you to love him, inconstancy makes you indifferent to him.

"I shall be here until the 9th," he concludes. "Do not put yourself out. Rush after plea

tures. Happiness was made for you The whole world is too happy if it can give you pleasure, and your husband alone is very, very unhappy ”

A still more pitiful letter followed next day, ending with the words · “ I reopen my letter to give you a kiss Oh, Josephine, Josephine ! ” The self-abasement of a conqueror could hardly have gone further. Josephine returned from Genoa to be forgiven, which did not take long. Her absence from Milan had been due to accident, not to design She had received an invitation from the old republic of Genoa to be present at some festivities, and, not expecting that Napoleon would reach Milan so soon, had accepted She came back when the festivities were over, and found little difficulty in persuading her husband that she was rejoiced to see him Having spent less than a dozen days with her since their marriage, he was easily cajoled Harmony was completely re-established, and no clouds seemed to mar the brightness of life at the Serbelloni palace Lavalette, who had just become one of the General’s aides-de-camp, writing of this period, says : “ The Commander-in-Chief was then in the full

intoxication of his married life Mme Bonaparte was charming, and all the troubles of command, all the cares of government of Italy, could not prevent her husband from abandoning himself freely to his domestic happiness "

Lavalette adds a little story of the time which is worth repetition "It was during this short stay at Milan that the young painter Gros made the first portrait of the General He represented him on the bridge of Lodi at the moment when, flag in hand, he hurled himself forward to inspire the troops The artist could not get a moment's audience, but Mme Bonaparte took her husband on her knees after breakfast and held him there for a few minutes " And in this way the portrait was painted

The examples are many of the similar exercise by Josephine of her power over her husband, and she undoubtedly rejoiced in its exhibition It is true that in most instances the power was used in obtaining trivial favours and that where she attempted to use it in more important matters she failed But there was one great exception to this rule It was not for nearly fourteen years that she was unsuccessful in

exerting her fascination over Napoleon to the extent of making him believe that she was the wife necessary to his happiness. Neglect<sup>1</sup> of him in his absence, and first suspicion, then actual certainty of her infidelity, could not estrange him any longer than for the time when he was out of the circle of her witchcraft

The story connecting Josephine's name with that of Charles did not yet apparently reach Napoleon's ears, although the hussar is said to have accompanied her to Genoa on the trip which prevented her from being at Milan on November 27. It required the intervention of a third party to drive him to take action

<sup>1</sup> Imbert de Saint-Amand suggests a rather amusing theory with regard to Josephine's neglect of her husband. "It is not impossible," he writes ("La Citoyenne Bonaparte," 121), "that Josephine's coldness was calculated. There are indeed men who are attached more by resistance than by yielding and who unwittingly prefer a variable sky, now splendid, now black and vexed by lightnings, to love's unclouded blue. Let us not forget that Josephine had to deal with a conqueror, and that love resembles war. She did not surrender, she let herself be conquered. Had she been more tender, more attentive, more loving, perhaps Bonaparte would have loved her less."

## CHAPTER IX

### MILAN AND MONTEBELLO

NAPOLÉON'S rest at Milan was not of long duration. Soon after the beginning of 1797 he was obliged to take the field once more against the Austrians. In the middle of January he was again in the thick of the fight. By February 3 when Wurmser capitulated at Mantua three Austrian armies had been destroyed in succession and all that remained was to conquer the Holy See. Josephine had been brought by her husband to Bologna before the commencement of the January campaign, and it was there that she received news from him that he expected soon to finish his task completely and to send for her. We know nothing about her stay at Bologna but can gather from one of Napoleon's letters that she was not contented with it. "You are melancholy and ill" he said on February 16 "you no longer write to me, you want to go to Paris"

Three days afterwards he wrote again announcing that the Pope had agreed to the Treaty of Tolentino and that if her health permitted she might come to meet him at Rimini or Ravenna. "But take care of yourself, I beg you," he added. The rest of the letter is an impassioned appeal for a word from her. "What have I done? . . . You are either ill or you do not love me. Do you think my heart is of marble? . . . You who doubtless know too well the absolute empire which you have over me, write to me, think of me, and love me!"

This is the last of Napoleon's letters of the Italian period preserved in Queen Hortense's collection. But the war was not yet over, as the General had hoped. Another Austrian army, led by the Archduke Charles, had entered Italy for a last effort to crush Napoleon, and he marched north again to meet it. Josephine likewise went northward and stopped at Mantua to rest. Early in March we see her writing to Hortense at Mme Campan's to say that she was recovering from an attack of fever.

"I have been rather ill at Bologna," she continues. "Besides, I am growing weary in

Italy in spite of all the fetes which they give me and the flattering welcome which I receive from the inhabitants of this beautiful country I cannot accustom myself to be separated so long from my dear children I want to press them to my heart I have every reason however to hope that this moment is not very far distant and this helps me much to recover from the indisposition from which I have been suffering Write to me often It is very long since I have had news from you Love your mamma as she loves you, and you will adore her Good-bye, my good little Hortense, your mamma embraces you and loves you with all her heart "

While Josephine was at Mantua Napoleon had driven back the Archduke and advanced into Austrian territory A series of successes brought him almost within sight of the walls of Vienna An armistice was signed early in April followed on the 18th by the peace preliminaries at Leoben Then while events were leading up to the occupation of Venice by his lieutenants, Napoleon rejoined Josephine In May they were once more together in the comfortable surroundings of the Serbelloni palace

at Milan Here, if the state had been considerable during the conqueror's previous residence, it was many times more magnificent now. The Court of Napoleon Bonaparte had begun, and in the midst of the combined assembly of French military notables and Italian aristocrats Josephine forgot her desire to return to Paris It always pleased her in later life to look back on this period, when the Milanese people waited for hours to catch a glimpse of the hero, and the hero's wife received the homage which he delighted to see her sharing with him. To add to her content, her son Eugène had been called from France to join the General's staff as aide-de-camp and lived in the palace near her side

The remaining days of May passed rapidly in the midst of receptions, promenades on the Corso, excursions to Como and Maggiore, and all that Milan and its neighbourhood could offer. Before the end of the month a move was made to Montebello, about half-way between Verona and Vicenza, which Napoleon had chosen as his headquarters during the hot season. Here, in a château large enough to be a palace, the whole Bonaparte family was to be lodged and

to make at last the acquaintance of her whom their greatest representative had introduced into their circle without consulting them. The ordeal now awaited Josephine which hitherto she had escaped. Joseph she had met in Paris a year before as we have seen, and Lucien and Louis were perhaps not quite strangers to her. But the part which she no doubt dreaded most still remained, to meet the Bonaparte ladies mother and daughters. With what anxiety must she not have thought of her thirty-four years of the complexion which required so much rouge and powder to disguise its loss of freshness of the teeth whose badness she must disguise by a smile which never opened her lips? And, still more with what terror must she not have reflected on the chances of the betrayal by gossip of her life as a widow in Paris and of her indiscretions since she had by her second marriage taken the name of those whom she was now about to encounter?

It was a rather fortunate circumstance that Mme Letizia Bonaparte and her daughters did not come to Montebello entirely in the role of critics. Without waiting for the consent of her illustrious son, the mother had but re-